

THE
WORKS
Of the Right Reverend Father in God,
Ofspring Blackall, D.D.

Late Lord Bishop of *EXETER*:

Consisting of EIGHTY SEVEN
PRACTICAL DISCOURSES

Upon OUR SAVIOUR'S
Sermon on the Mount:

Together with his
SERMONS preach'd at *Boyle's* Lecture,

In the Cathedral Church of *St. Paul*, in the Year 1700.

With several others upon PARTICULAR OCCASIONS,

Being all that were published of his Lordship's.

WITH
A PREFACE giving some Account of the AUTHOR,
By the Most Reverend Father in God,
WILLIAM Lord Archbishop of *TORK*,
PRIMATE of *England*, and METROPOLITAN.

V O L. II.

L O N D O N:
Printed for THOMAS WARD in the *Inner-Temple* Lane, 1723.



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Ostspring Blackall, D.D.

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PRAC



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THE
CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LV.

Lead us not into Temptation, but, &c. explain'd.

MATTH. vi. 13.

And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.

Page 609.

DISCOURSE LVI.

For thine is the Kingdom, &c. explain'd.

MATTH. vi. 13.

For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever. Amen.

p. 616.

DISCOURSE LVII.

Of the Nature and Duty of Fasting.

MATTH. vi. 16, 17, 18.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites, of a sad Countenance: for they disfigure their Faces, that they may appear unto Men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their Reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine Head, and wash thy Face: That thou appear not unto Men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

p. 627.

DISCOURSE LVIII.

Solicitude for this World censured.

MATTH. vi. 19, 20, 21.

Lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth, where Moth and Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves break through and steal.

†

But

The CONTENTS.

But lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven, where neither Moth nor Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also.

p. 638.

DISCOURSE LIX.

The Light of the Body spiritually applied.

MATTH. vi. 22, 23.

The Light of the Body is the Eye: if therefore thine Eye be single, thy whole Body shall be full of Light.

But if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body shall be full of Darkness. If therefore the Light that is in thee be Darkness, how great is that Darkness!

p. 647.

DISCOURSE LX.

The Service of God and Mammon compared.

MATTH. vi. 24.

No Man can serve two Masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

p. 658.

DISCOURSE LXI.

Worldly Cares not absolutely forbidden.

MATTH. vi. 25.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on: Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?

p. 670.

DISCOURSE LXII.

What worldly Cares are prohibited.

Text *ibid.*

p. 679.

DISCOURSE LXIII.

The Sinfulness of excessive Care.

MATTH. vi. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat,
†
or

The CONTENTS.

or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on: Is not the life more than meat, and the Body than raiment?

Behold the Fowls of the Air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit unto his Stature?

And why take ye thought for Raiment? Consider the Lilies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.

And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore if God so clothe the Grass of the Field, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little Faith?

Therefore take no Thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these Things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these Things.

p. 687.

DISCOURSE LXIV.

Religion the chief Business of Life.

MATTH. vi. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.

p. 699.

DISCOURSE LXV.

Religion the chief Business of Life.

Text *ibid.*

p. 709.

DISCOURSE LXVI.

Religion a divine Security from Want.

Text *ibid.*

p. 720.

DISCOURSE LXVII.

Religion consistent with, and conducive to temporal Interest.

Text *ibid.*

p. 730.

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LXVIII.

Anxiety for the Things of the Morrow considered and censured.

MATTH. vi. 34.

Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow: for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self: sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.

P. 742.

DISCOURSE LXIX.

The Unreasonableness and Remedies of Anxiety.

Text *ibid.*

P. 752.

DISCOURSE LXX.

The Case of Judging considered and stated.

MATTH. vii. 1, 2.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

P. 762.

DISCOURSE LXXI.

The Sinfulness and Folly of Judging.

Text *ibid.*

P. 772.

DISCOURSE LXXII.

Rules for Judging of Others.

MATTH. vii. 3, 4, 5.

*And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?
Or how wilt thou say to thy Brother, Let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye; and behold, a Beam is in thine own Eye?
Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.*

P. 781.

I

DIS.

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LXXIII.

Caution requisite in Reproving.

MATTH. vii. 6.

Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.

Page 792.

DISCOURSE LXXIV.

Of the Nature and Duty of Prayer.

MATTH. vii. 7, 8.

Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

p. 804.

DISCOURSE LXXV.

Of the Qualifications of Prayer.

Text *ibid.*

p. 813.

DISCOURSE LXXVI.

Our Assurance of the Success of our Prayers.

MATTH. vii. 9, 10, 11.

Or what Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will he give him a Stone?

Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent?

If ye then being Evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to them that ask him?

p. 823.

DISCOURSE LXXVII.

The Grounds of our Assurance of the Success of our Prayers.

Text *ibid.*

p. 831.

DIS-

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LXXVIII.

To do, as you would be done unto, explained and recommended.

MATTH. vii. 12.

Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets. p. 839.

DISCOURSE LXXIX.

The Difficulties in a godly Life.

MATTH. vii. 13, 14.

Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it. p. 851.

DISCOURSE LXXX.

The Pleasantness of a wicked Life no just Recommendation of it.

Text *ibid.*

p. 860.

DISCOURSE LXXXI.

Cautions against false Prophets.

MATTH. vii. 15.

Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheep's Clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves. p. 869.

DISCOURSE LXXXII.

The Way of discerning false Prophets.

MATTH. vii. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Ye shall know them by their Fruits: Do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles?

Even so every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit: but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit.

A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit: neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.

Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewen down and cast into the Fire.

Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.

p. 881.

DIS.

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LXXXIII.

The Way of discerning false Prophets.

Text *ibid.*

p. 891.

DISCOURSE LXXXIV.

The Insufficiency of Faith without Works.

MATTH. vii. 21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.

p. 899.

DISCOURSE LXXXV.

False Pretensions to Salvation.

MATTH. vii. 22, 23.

Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.

p. 911.

DISCOURSE LXXXVI.

The Difference between the Hypocrite and the sincere Christian, in a Day of Trial.

MATTH. vii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

Therefore, whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock:

And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House: and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.

And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand:

And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House: and it fell, and great was the Fall thereof.

p. 922.

DISCOURSE LXXXVII.

The Manner and Effects of our Saviour's Preaching.

MATTH. vii. 28, 29.

And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine.

For he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.

p. 932.

VOL. II.

DIS.

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE LXXXVIII.

The Sufficiency of a standing Revelation.

LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead. P. 940.

DISCOURSE LXXXIX.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation; As to the Matter of it.

Text *ibid.*

P. 952.

DISCOURSE XC.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation; As to the Proof of it. PART I.

Text *ibid.*

P. 965.

DISCOURSE XCI.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation; As to the Proof of it. PART II.

Text *ibid.*

P. 979.

DISCOURSE XCII.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation; As to the Proof of it. PART II.

Text *ibid.*

P. 993.

DISCOURSE CXIII.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation; As to the Proof of it. PART III.

Text *ibid.*

P. 1009.

DISCOURSE CXIV.

New Revelations cannot reasonably be desired.

Text *ibid.*

P. 1025.

DISCOURSE XCV.

New Revelations would probably be unsuccessful.

Text *ibid.*

P. 1038.

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE XCVI.

The Unreasonableness of Separation. A Visitation Sermon.

JOHN vii. 66, 67, 68.

From that Time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal Life. p. 1053.

DISCOURSE XCVII.

God's Design in afflicting good Men.

JOHN ix. 3.

Jesus answered, Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents: but that the Works of God should be made manifest in him. p. 1070.

DISCOURSE XCVIII.

St. Paul and St. James reconciled. A Commencement Sermon.

JAMES ii. 24.

Ye see then how that by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only. p. 1082.

DISCOURSE XCIX.

Uncharitable Judgment reprov'd.

LUKE xiii. 4, 5.

Or those eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. p. 1096.

DISCOURSE C.

The Lawfulness and the right Manner of keeping Christmas, and other Christian Festivals.

ISAIAH v. 11, 12.

Wo unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until Night, till Wine enflame them. And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts: but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands. p. 1111.

DIS-

The CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE CI.

The Subject's Duty.

PROV. xxiv. 21.

My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King: and meddle not with them that are given to Change. p. 1121.

DISCOURSE CII.

The Way of trying Prophets.

I JOHN iv. 1.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World. p. 1136.

DISCOURSE CIII.

Of Children's bearing the Iniquities of their Fathers.

LAMENT. v. 7.

Our Fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their Iniquities.

p. 1149.

DISCOURSE CIV.

The divine Institution of Magistracy, and the gracious Design of its Institution.

ROM. xiii. 4.

For he is the Minister of God to thee for Good. But if thou do that which is Evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the Sword in vain: for he is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doeth Evil.

p. 1161.

DISCOURSE CV.

The Rules and Measures of Almsgiving, and the manifold Advantages of Charity-Schools.

LUKE vi. 30.

Give to every Man that asketh of thee.

p. 1174.

The Lord Bishop of Exeter's Letter to the Clergy of his Diocese.

†

p. 1187.

DISCOURSE LV.

Lead us not into Temptation, but, &c.

Explain'd.

MATTH. VI. 13.

And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.



In the *Lord's Prayer* (as I have formerly observed) are three principal Parts, the Preface, the Body of the Prayer, and the Conclusion.

The Preface consists of a solemn Invocation of Almighty God, whom we are taught to stile, *Our Father* which is in *Heaven*.

The Body of the Prayer consists of six distinct Petitions.

And the Conclusion contains a Doxology, or a solemn giving Glory to God; *Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever.*

And of the Preface, and of five of the Petitions I have already spoken; the sixth Petition is what I am now to discourse of; *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.*

In discoursing on which, I shall observe the same Method that I have before done in discoursing on the other five, *i.e.*

I. I shall explain the Meaning of the Petition, or shew what Sense we ought to have in our Minds, when we utter these Words in Prayer to God, *Lead us not into, &c.* And,

II. I shall shew, what good Lessons we may learn, what Duties we are taught and instructed in, by our Use of this Petition.

I. I shall explain the Meaning of the Petition, and shew what Sense we ought to have in our Minds, when we utter these Words in Prayer to God, *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.*

And this Petition consists of two Parts, not exactly the same, and yet not much differing in Sense from each other. 1. *Lead us not into Temptation;* and, 2. *Deliver us from Evil.*

1. *Lead us not into Temptation.* For the understanding of which, we must enquire, (1.) What is meant by *Temptation*; and, (2.) How God may be said to *lead us into it*.

(1.) What is meant by *Temptation*. And,

I. The Word, *Temptation*, most properly signifies nothing else but only a Trial or Experiment made of any Person, to see of what Temper and Disposition he is, and how he is morally qualified. And thus God tempted *Abraham*, when he laid upon him that hard Command of sacrificing his only

Son *Isaac*; by which God made a full Trial of his Faith and Obedience, and declared himself fully satisfied therewith; as the Angel, speaking in the Name of God, and of God, after the manner of Men, testifies, *Gen. xxii. 12. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine only Son, from me.*

Jam. i. 2. And thus all Afflictions and Adversities that befall the Body, are *Temptations*; i.e. They are Trials of our Faith and Patience. *My Brethren*, says St. James, *count it all Joy when ye fall into diverse Temptations*; i.e. when ye are persecuted and afflicted.

And thus, likewise, Prosperity is also a Temptation; for 'tis a Trial of our Sobriety, and Humility, and Trust in God.

Thus indeed all the different States and Circumstances, that any of us are in, are *Temptations*; i.e. They are such Trials as God sees good to make of our Faith and Virtue; not to satisfy himself, (for he knows before-hand what we will do,) but to satisfy our selves and others, how we stand affected towards him, and to make the Righteousness of that Judgment which he will pass upon us, either to Salvation or Damnation, evident to all the World.

Now against these, and all such Temptations as these in general, we ought not to pray; for they are the necessary Condition of our living here in this World; our whole Life here being nothing else but a State of Trial, and consequently of Temptation; such as it was necessary we should be put into, in order to make us capable of either Reward or Punishment. For there would be no Virtue, if there were no Trial of Virtue; and no Vice, if there were no Temptation or Inducement to it; it being hardly to be supposed, that any Man that believes a future State, or has any Sense of Religion, would chuse to commit Wickedness, only for its own sake, without any Prospect of Profit or Pleasure, or some other worldly Advantage. And if we manfully resist these Temptations that we are assaulted with, our Reward in Heaven will be great, proportionably to the Power and Strength of those Temptations that we meet withal and overcome. And therefore St. James (as I observed before) in the first Chapter of his Epistle, at the 2^d Verse, bids us to *count it all Joy when we fall into diverse Temptations; knowing this, that the trying of our Faith worketh Patience.* And ver. 12. *Blessed*, says he, *is the Man that endureth Temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

2. Therefore, because sometimes we do not abide those Trials which God makes of us, but sink under them, and are overcome by them, (therefore, I say,) the Word *Temptation* is sometimes, and indeed most commonly, us'd in a bad Sense, for such an Allurement and Inducement to Sin, as does actually prevail with us to commit the Sin; or for such a Trial of us, as is made with a Design that we should commit the Sin which we are tempted to.

And thus the *Devil* tempts us; that is, he allures and invites us to commit Sin; he lays Baits for us of a delicious Taste, or finely gilded over, which he hopes we will catch at, and take in, and with them swallow down also the Hook that was covered over therewith. And thus to pray that we may not fall into Temptation, or be *led into Temptation*, is the same Thing in effect, as to pray that we may not fall by the Temptation, or that we may not fall into the Sin that we are tempted to, or that we may not be ensnared and taken captive by the Devil.

But taking the Word *Temptation* in this Sense, God does never tempt us; we can't consequently, taking the Word in this Sense, pray that God would *not lead us into Temptation*; for he never designs our Sin, or Fall, by any Trial that he makes of us; but only our Improvement in Grace and Virtue. And thus we are taught by St. James, Jam. i. 13. *Let no Man say, when he*

is tempted; i. e. when he actually falls into any Sin, (let him not say) *I am tempted of God*, i. e. I was seduc'd and betray'd therein by God; for *God can not be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any Man*.

But now, if it be so, that the first sort of the Temptations before spoken of; i. e. the Tryals of our Faith and Obedience, are such as we ought not to pray against, but rather to rejoyce at; as has been shewn already: And if the last sort of Temptations, those which are design'd to ensnare us, are such as God doth not use upon us; for he never designs to allure or invite us to commit Sin: (He *tempteth no Man*, as St. James says) how is it that we are taught in this Petition, to pray to God that *He would not lead us into Temptation*? For all God's Temptations are design'd for our good, for the Exercise of our Virtue, and the increase of our Reward: And the other Temptations, those which are design'd for our hurt, are the Devil's Temptations, and not God's. This therefore was the next Thing I was to give an Account of; viz.

(2.) How God may be said to lead us into Temptation.

And the Case is this; tho' it be the Devil that tempts us to Sin, he could do nothing without God's Permission: And such is his Subtily and Power, and such is our Easiness and Weakness, that his Temptations must needs prevail against us, unless God be pleas'd by his Grace to assist and enable us to overcome them. So that whenever God suffers the Devil to tempt us above our Strength, or by such a strong Temptation as can hardly but prevail; or when he does not furnish us with supernatural Strength to resist such Temptations; in any of all these Cases, God may, in some Sense, be said to lead us (because he, who if he pleas'd could easily hinder it, suffers us to be led) into Temptation.

This therefore is what, in this Petition, we pray that God would not do, that he would not lead us into Temptation; i. e. that he would never suffer us to be tried above our Strength; or that if the Temptation that he suffers us to be assaulted with, be such as would prevail against our Weakness, he would be pleas'd to strengthen us by his Grace, that we may be able to resist it.

And this is a Petition which we have good Warrant to put up to God, because it is no more, than God, who is faithful, has promis'd, 1 Cor. x. 13. *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able; but will with the Temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

But now if this be God's Promise, and he, being faithful, will certainly make it good, not to suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; here rises another Difficulty; viz. what need there is of our praying for that which God will certainly do, whether we pray for it or no.

But this Difficulty will be easily remov'd, by considering these two Things.

1. That this Promise of God, that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, or that he will grant us sufficient Grace to withstand and overcome the Temptations we are assaulted with, is, like all the other Promises of the Gospel, a conditional Promise, to entitle us to which, there is something to be done by us: And particularly, that Prayer to God is the Condition to be perform'd on our Part, to give us a Right and Title to this Promise of God; that Prayer to God is the Condition of our obtaining sufficient Grace, according to that of our Saviour, *Math. vii. 7. Ask, and it shall be given you*; by which he plainly intimates, that unless we do ask we may go without it: And so St. James says expressly, *Jam. iv. 2. Ye have not, because ye ask not.* And yet in this Case our Sin and Destruction may be of our selves, because we might, for the asking, have had sufficient Grace to avoid them. But then it may be consider'd farther,

2. That if there were no Condition pre-requisite for the obtaining of sufficient Grace; if we might be sure of it without our asking, by virtue of this Promise; yet this, as well as any other Right or Privilege which we once had a Title to, may be forfeited by our Misbehaviour.

And

And this may be, and without doubt oftentimes is, the Case here. God at first suffers us not to be tempted above our Strength, and this he does of his mere Goodness, without any Condition on our Part: And so long as we make good use of that Grace which is afforded us, so long our Title to a sufficient Measure of it holds good. But if we at any time, wilfully and deliberately chuse the Commission of a Sin, while we had sufficient Strength to resist the Temptation, we thereby forfeit all our right and claim for the future. And the same Goodness which gave us sufficient Grace at first, and which would still have continued to do the same, if we had been careful to co-operate with it, may not give us sufficient Grace every time afterwards that we are tempted; but rather, our sinning wilfully, when we had sufficient Grace given us to keep us from sinning, may justly provoke God to lessen or withdraw that Grace which we have so much abus'd; according to that Threatning of our Saviour, *From him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath.*

And indeed besides; if God should continue to us the same Measure of Grace afterwards, that he had communicated to us before, (which yet is more than can reasonably be hop'd) 'tis to be consider'd nevertheless, that such a Measure of Grace as was before sufficient, may not be sufficient afterwards; because that Grace that was before given, might be proportion'd only to our natural Weakness; and by every wilful Sin we render our selves weaker and weaker, and consequently needing a greater Measure of Grace to keep us from falling; and tho' God may be thought to be (if we may be allow'd so to speak) under some sort of Obligation in Equity, so to assist our weak Nature as that we should not at first necessarily fall into a Sin, he can't be thought oblig'd upon the same Account to increase his Grace, when we come to have need of a greater Measure of it than we had at first; because, that we have now need of more Grace than we had then, is our own fault only, who have weakened our Nature by evil Custom: And there is no reason to expect, that God's Grace should abound, according as our Sin does abound.

Now this is in Truth the Case; we had sufficient Strength once, either by Nature or by Grace, (and 'tis no Matter now by which) to have withstood those Temptations to Sin, which God did then suffer us to be assaulted with; it was our own Fault, therefore, that we then fell, when we had Strength to stand; and ever since that first Fall, we have fallen very frequently; (this we own'd in the former Petition, when we pray'd for Forgiveness of our Trespases;) and therefore having by our own Sin forfeited all claim to the Divine Grace, there is great Reason that we should now beg it as a Favour, since we can't claim it as a Due, that God would not lead us into Temptation; *i. e.* that either he would not suffer us to be tempted above our Strength, that is, not above those Remains of the Strength of Nature that are still left to us; or else, in Case he sees fit to permit us to be assaulted by more violent Temptations, that he would be pleas'd to give us such a Supply of his Grace, as may be sufficient to strengthen our Weakness, and to enable us to resist and conquer them.

Thus we pray that God would not lead us into Temptation, *i. e.* that in this State of Tryal and Temptation, which we are now put into by the Divine Providence, he would be pleas'd to have consideration of our Weakness; *viz.* both of the Weakness of our frail Nature, and also of that greater Weakness which we have contracted by our former Sins, and never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able. *Lead us not into Temptation.* But it follows in this same Petition,

2. *But deliver us from evil;* the Meaning of which Words I am now to shew.

And there are three Significations of the Word *evil*, all which are consistent together, and agreeable to the Scope and Design of the Place, and therefore however we may approve any one of them more than another, I do not see why we should exclude any of them. For,

†

1. By

1. By the *Evil* that we here pray to be delivered from, we may understand the *Evil* of *Sin*, which is sometimes in Scripture called *Evil*; as in *Habak. i. 13. Thou art of purer Eyes than to behold Evil.* And taking the Word in this Sense, this Clause of the Petition, *Deliver us from Evil*, will be the same in Sense with the former, *Lead us not into Temptation*; for then, what we here pray for will be, that God would so assist us by his Grace, that we may not fall by any Temptations that we are assaulted with. Or,

2. By *Evil*, we may understand, the *Evil* of *Punishment*; which is likewise in Scripture sometimes express'd by that Word, as in *Jer. xviii. 8.* In which Verse we have an Instance of the Word *Evil*, used both in this Sense, and in the former Sense of it. *If, says God, that Nation against whom I have spoken, turn from their Evil, (i. e. from the Evil of their Ways) I will repent of the Evil, (i. e. of the Evil of Punishment) which I had thought and threatned to do unto them.* And so it is likewise said in *Jonah iii. 10.* That God repented of the *Evil* that he said he would do unto Niniveh, and he did it not; i. e. He did not bring that Destruction upon them which he had sent *Jonah* to denounce against them. And taking the Word *Evil* in this Sense, this Clause of the Lord's Prayer will be much the same in Sense, with the Fifth Petition, *Forgive us our Trespases*; for then our Sins are forgiven us by God, when the just Punishment of them is remitted, when we are deliver'd from that *Evil* which we had deserv'd to suffer. Or,

3. Lastly, By *Evil*, we may understand, the *Evil One*, i. e. The *Devil*, who is sometimes in Scripture so called; as particularly in *1 Joh. iii. 12. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked One,* ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, the same Word that is used here, *Deliver us from Evil*, ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, from the *Evil One*. And he may well be called, the *Evil One*, because he was the first Author of all the Sin that has been in the World, and of all the Misery that has been, or ever will be caused thereby.

Now these three Senses of the Word *Evil*, are (as I said before) all consistent with, and subordinate one to the other, so that I think they may all be well enough understood to be design'd in this Place, when we are taught to say, *Deliver us from Evil*; for by the *Evil* of *Sin*, we render our selves obnoxious to the *Evil* of *Punishment*, and particularly to that greatest of all Punishments, to be led *Captive* by the *Devil* here, and to be eternally tormented by him hereafter.

The Sense then that we ought to have in our Minds, when we utter the Words of this Petition, is this, as if we should say, "We know, O Lord, that we are set in the midst of many and great Dangers, by reason of the various Temptations that we are subject to in this mortal Life, which we can't resist, but by thy Help; and therefore we pray thee, without whose Appointment or Permission, nothing can happen to us, that either thou would'st not suffer us to be tempted strongly, or else that thou would'st be pleas'd to grant us such a large Supply of thy Grace, that we may not fall by any Temptation, how strong soever it be; but that being by thy Help preserv'd from all Sin, we may also clearly escape the Punishment thereof, both in this World, and in the next. *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.*"

And now, having explain'd the Meaning of this Petition, I proceed in the Second Place, according to the Method before laid down,

II. To shew, what good Lessons we may learn, what Duties we are taught and instructed in, in our Use of this Petition. And,

1. As we pray, so we ought to practise; this is a general Rule of Duty: we should never pray for any Thing, but we should at the same Time endeavour

deavour, by the Use of all lawful Means that are in our Power, to procure the same to our selves; for God is no Friend to Sloth and Laziness; he has no where promis'd to help those who will do nothing for themselves.

Besides, *Help* is but *Help*; it enables those that work, to perform the Work that they set themselves to, but it does not do their Work for them; it assists them that endeavour to do their Work, but it would be more than Help and Assistance, if it did all the Work by it self, without their Concurrence and Co-operation.

Being therefore here taught to pray to God, that we may not be led into Temptation, it is plainly our Duty not to run our selves into Temptation, but on the contrary, to use all the prudent Means we can, to avoid the same. And this Duty we are taught by our Saviour himself, at the 29th and 30th Verses of the foregoing Chapter. *If thy right Eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee, — and if thy right Hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy Members should perish, and not that thy whole Body should be cast into Hell.*

'Tis in vain, 'tis indeed too late, to pray that we may not be led into Temptation, or that we may not fall by the Temptation, when we our selves have chosen it; for by wilfully running into Temptation, we consent to our own Fall; by chusing what we foresee will be the Occasion of our sinning, we give Consent to the Sin that is occasion'd thereby, and fully contract the Guilt of the sinful Action, even before the Action it self is done. Nay, by chusing the Temptation we contract the Guilt of the Sin, altho' by some other Restraint or Impediment accidentally coming in our Way we should be hindred from doing the Act it self; so that whenever we give our Consent to that which will probably be the Cause or Occasion of our committing a Sin, we do then fall into Temptation, and we do then fall by the Temptation; and when we our selves are our own Tempters, 'tis no better than trifling with God, or mocking of God, to pray, that *he would not lead us into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.*

2. From our Use of this Petition in the Lord's Prayer, we are farther taught, that 'tis not only our Duty to avoid Temptations as much as we can, but likewise to fore-arm our selves as well as we can, against those Temptations which we are liable to in this mortal State, and which, by all our Care and Caution, we cannot wholly avoid. For 'tis a vain Thing to pray to God for any Good, either spiritual or temporal, which we our selves will be at no Pains to procure to our selves. And therefore we are taught by our Saviour, not only to pray, but likewise to *watch* against Temptation, *Matth. xxvi. 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.* And *Mark xiii. 33. Take ye heed, watch and pray; and ver. 37. What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.* And to this same Purpose we are also exhorted by the Apostles; by St. James, *Jam. iv. 7. Resist the Devil*; by St. Peter, *1 Pet. v. 9. Be sober, be vigilant, because your Adversary the Devil, as a roaring Lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, stedfast in the Faith*: And by St. Paul, *Eph. vi. 11. Put on the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil.*

And indeed, if we set our selves with all our Strength to resist Temptations, we may then reasonably hope for such an Assistance of the divine Grace as will enable us to overcome them; but if we our selves give Ground, while we are able to stand, there is great reason to fear, that God will withdraw his Grace from us, when he sees we do not use it and improve it as we ought to do; according to that severe, and yet most just Threatning of our Saviour, before cited, *Matth. xiii. 12. Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more Abundance; but whosoever hath not, (i.e. makes not Use of what he has) from him shall be taken away, even that which he hath.*

3. Lastly, From the Place which this Petition has, from the Order in which it lies, in the Lord's Prayer; from its succeeding the foregoing Petition, wherein we had beg'd Forgiveness of our Sins, and from its being immediately subjoin'd therunto, we may learn, That there is no Ground to hope for Forgiveness of our past Sins, without a firm Resolution, and a sincere Endeavour to reform our Lives. For unless this were necessary to obtain a full Remission of our past Sins, we might have put an End to our Prayer with that Petition; because having our Sins forgiven, we should by that alone, be capable of, and entitled to, all the Promises of the Gospel, and so should not need to be concern'd for any Thing farther. According to that of the Psalmist, Psal. xxxii. 1, 2. *Blessed is he whose Unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose Sin is covered. Blessed is the Man unto whom the Lord imputeth not Iniquity.* Being therefore here taught, after we had beg'd Pardon of our former Sins, still to continue our Petition; and to beg yet farther for divine Grace and Help, to enable us to resist and overcome Temptations for the Time to come, it hereby plainly appears, that we are not capable of this Blessedness that the Psalmist speaks of, without a Reformation of our Lives; and consequently, that Remission of Sins, wherein that Blessedness does consist, will not be granted to us on any other Terms. And this is agreeable to the whole Tenor of the Bible; *Repent and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out*, so the Apostles preach'd, *Acts* iii. 19. *And repent of this thy Wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the Thought of thine Heart may be forgiven thee*, was the good Advice of St. Peter to Simon the Magician, *Acts* viii. 22. *first he was to repent, and then he was to pray for Pardon*; for a Prayer for Pardon before, or without Repentance, the Apostle knew would be ineffectual: And to them who observe the Method there prescrib'd by the Apostle; i. e. who both repent, and also pray for Pardon, a most sure Promise of Forgiveness is made; *Isai.* i. 16, 17, 18. *Wash you, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes, cease to do Evil, learn to do Well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; tho' your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be white as Snow, tho' they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool.* And to the same Sense is that of the Wise Man, *Prov.* xxviii. 13. *He that covereth his Sins shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have Mercy.*

And now I have done with the second Part of the Lord's Prayer, which consists of Petition to God.

The third and last Part of it is the Conclusion, contain'd in the latter Part of the 13th Verse, *For thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever. Amen.*

But I think it will be best to defer discoursing on that, to some other Time.



DISCOURSE LVI.

For thine is the Kingdom, &c. explain'd.

MATTH. VI. 13.

— For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever.



IN the Lord's Prayer there are, (as I have formerly noted) three principal Parts; 1. the Preface; 2. the Body of the Prayer; and 3. the Conclusion; and of the two first of these I have already spoken.

The third Part of the Prayer, or the Conclusion, of which I am now to discourse, contains *first* a Doxology, or solemn giving Glory to God, *Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever*: And *secondly*, an Expression of our full Approbation of, and hearty Consent to, the whole foregoing Prayer, in the Word, *Amen*.

I shall now speak somewhat of each of these, in the same Method which I have hitherto observ'd in discoursing of all the foregoing Clauses of this Prayer; *i. e.* 1. I shall explain their Meaning, and shew what Sense we ought to have in our Minds when we utter these Words: And 2. I shall shew what good Lessons we are taught, what Duties we are instructed in, by the Use thereof.

And in this Method I shall first discourse of the Doxology, or giving Glory to God; *For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever*.

Which Words may be understood either, *first*, as a Recognition or Acknowledgment of the Greatness and Majesty of God; or *secondly*, assigning some special Reasons inducing us to ask, and which we hope will likewise induce God to grant the several Requests which had been before put up to him.

1. I say, these Words may be understood as a simple Doxology; *i. e.* only as a Recognition or Acknowledgment of the Greatness and Majesty of God; thus,

Thine is the Kingdom; i. e. "We heartily acknowledge thy supreme Dominion over us, and the whole World; we adore and worship thee, as the great King, the sovereign Lord of all."

And, *thine is the Power, i. e.* "We own likewise, and humbly adore that infinite Power, whereby thou art able to govern the World, and to order all the Affairs of it according to thine own Pleasure, notwithstanding any Opposition that is made to thy Will, by evil Men, or Devils, or any other created Being."

And, *thine is the Glory; i. e.* "We give thee the Glory of thy Greatness and Power, and of all the Things that thou dost, and of all the Good that thou workest in us, or bestowest upon us."

And lastly; We hereby acknowledge, that God always was, and ever will be, the same that he is at present; that he changeth not, but ever was, and ever will be, as great, as powerful, and as glorious as now; that he is infinitely and eternally such, *the same Yesterday, to Day, and for ever. Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever.*

And, thus understood, this Doxology at the Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, is the same in Sense with that larger Form of Praise and Thanksgiving that was us'd by David, and is recorded in 1 Chron. xxix. 10. &c. And David said; *Blessed be thou, O Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever; thine, O Lord, is the Greatness, and the Power, and the Glory, and the Victory, and the Majesty; for all that is in the Heaven and in the Earth, is thine; thine is the Kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all. Both Riches and Honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine Hand is Power and Might, and in thine Hand it is to make great, and to give Strength unto all; now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious Name. Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory for ever; i. e.*

"We humbly acknowledge, and reverently adore the greatness of thy Kingdom, the Mightiness of thy Power, and the Gloriousness of thy Majesty, and the Eternity of these and all other thy infinite and glorious Perfections." But,

2. We may also, as I said, understand these Words, as assigning some special Reasons inducing us to ask, and which we hope will likewise induce God to grant the several Requests that we had before put up to him. And the Connexion that is made between these Words, and the foregoing Petitions by the Word, *for*; *For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory*, seems to favour this Interpretation. And thus understood, the Sense of them will be this.

For thine is the Kingdom; i. e. "We therefore beg these Things of thee, because thou art our King; for thou art the sovereign Lord of the whole World; and we are thy Subjects, who have our whole Dependence upon thee, and must receive all that we want from thy riches and fulness. Upon which Accounts it is befitting us to ask of thee, and it is suitable to thy Prerogative to grant our Requests.

And thine also is the Power; i. e. "We therefore put up our Prayers to thee, because we know, that thou, being of infinite Power, art able to grant all that we desire; and we also hope that thou wilt do it, because the granting these our Requests will be an Expression and Manifestation of the Greatness of thy Power."

And thine also is the Glory; i. e. "By making known our Wants to thee, and humbly craving a Supply thereof from thy Bounty, we give thee the Glory that is due unto thy Name. And this also is a farther Ground of Hope to us, that thou wilt grant our Requests, because to thee of Right will belong the Glory and Praise of all that we have, and of all that we do; seeing we have nothing but from thy Bounty, and can do nothing but by thy Help."

And thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory for ever; i. e. "As it is now, so it ever was, and ever will be; *thy Kingdom* is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy Dominion endureth throughout all Ages; and *thy Power* is unalterable, not capable of Increase, because infinite; nor possible to be lessen'd, because superior to all other Power; and *thy Glory* also is eternal; and because thou changeth not, we have an entire Confidence, and a sure Trust in thee, that thou both canst and wilt, both now, and at all Times, hear the Prayers that we put up to thee."

But these two Senses of this Clause of the Lord's Prayer, though they are somewhat different, yet are not at all disagreeing to each other; so that they

may both be well enough meant by us when we utter these Words. And then the full Sense that we ought to have in our Minds, when we say this Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, will be, as if we should say.—

“ And now that we have put up our Petitions to thee for what we want, it is but fit that we should also render thee the Praise and Thanks that are thy Due. We acknowledge therefore, that thou art a great King, whom we ought to worship with the lowliest Reverence; and we own that thy Power is infinite, and are therefore sure that thou canst grant what we have desired; and we confess that thy Glory is above all, and we therefore desire that thou mayst be glorified in all the good Things that thou bestowest upon us; and lastly, we acknowledge that thy Kingdom and Power and Glory are for ever, that they are eternal, and immutable; and therefore we do, and shall at all Times, put our whole Trust in thee, because we acknowledge that thou canst never fail us.”

And this Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer is fruitful of good Instruction, as well as were all the foregoing Clauses of it;

And what Instructions they are that we receive from thence, was the next Thing I was to shew. And,

1. In general; from this Doxology or Form of Praise being added by our Lord himself to that Form of Prayer which he has taught us to use, and according to which as a Pattern we are to compose all our own Prayers, we may learn, that it is our Duty always to accompany our Petitions to God for the Mercies we want, with Praises and Thanksgivings to him for the Mercies we have received, and with joyful Acknowledgements of his Majesty, Greatness, and Bounty; according to those Directions given by the *Apostle*, 1 *Thess.* v. 17, 18. *Pray without ceasing, and in every Thing give Thanks; and Phil.* iv. 6. *In every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto God.*

2. And more particularly.

From the *first* Clause of this Doxology, *for thine is the Kingdom*, we are put in Mind that it is our Duty in all Things to submit our selves to the Will of God, and to resign our selves to his Disposal, whom we here acknowledge to have the sovereign Dominion over all.

From the *second* Clause of it, *thine is the Power*, we are farther taught, that it is our Duty in all our Sreights and Difficulties, to seek for his Grace and Succour to direct and support us, and in all our Dangers and Wants, to rely upon his All-sufficiency to deliver and relieve us; according to that of the *Apostle*, in the Place just before cited. *Be careful for nothing but in every Thing by Prayer and Supplication, — let your Requests be made known unto God.*

And from the third Clause of it, *thine is the Glory*, we are farther taught to direct all our Actions to his Glory, to whom we here acknowledge that all Glory is due; according to that of the same *Apostle*, in 1 *Cor.* x. 13. *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

And lastly, from that Eternity which we here acknowledge in all the Divine Attributes and Perfections, when we say that this Kingdom, and Power, and Glory are *for ever*, we are taught to worship him continually, to praise him evermore, and to give divine Honours to none besides him; because he is God from everlasting to everlasting, and besides him there is no other God, and his Glory he will not give to another.

There is only one Word of the Lord's Prayer, that now remains to be spoken of, viz. *Amen.*

And this is an *Hebrew* Word, signifying, *truly, verily*, or the like: And it is a Phrase often us'd by our *Saviour* at the Beginning of his Speech,

to engage the Attention and Credit of his Hearers to what he was about to say. *Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν*, which we translate, *Verily I say unto you*: And in the Gospel of St. John, the Word is always doubled, *Ἀμὴν, Ἀμὴν, Verily, Verily, I say unto you*; i. e. of a Truth I say unto you, or, in good Truth it is so as I say. And that this is the true Meaning of the Word, appears from several Places in St. Luke's Gospel, parallel to some others in St. Matthew, or the other Evangelists, where he uses the Greek Word *ἀληθῶς*, the proper Signification of which is, *indeed, truly, or of a Truth*, where the other Evangelists had used the Hebrew Word, *Amen*. Thus, in Luke ix. 27. we read these Words of our Saviour; *I tell you, ἀληθῶς, of a Truth, that there be some standing here, which shall not taste of Death, till they see the Kingdom of God*; but in Matth. xvi. 28. and Mark ix. 1. where this same Passage is related, the Hebrew Word *Ἀμὴν* is retain'd; *Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, Verily, I say unto you*. So again, in Luke xii. 44. 'tis said, *Ἀληθῶς, Of a Truth, I say unto you, he will make him Ruler over all that he hath*; but in Matth. xxiv. 47. 'tis, *Ἀμὴν, Verily, I say unto you, he will make him Ruler over all his Goods*. And the same may be observ'd again, in Luke xxi. 3. where our Lord, giving his Judgment of the poor Widow, that had cast her two Mites into the Treasury, says, *Ἀληθῶς, Of a Truth, I say unto you, that this poor Widow hath cast in more than they all*: But in Mark xii. 43. the Hebrew Word is retain'd; *Ἀμὴν, Verily I say unto you, this poor Widow hath cast in more than they all*.

This therefore being the proper Meaning of the Word *Amen*, it being an Adverb of affirming, the design of adding it at the Conclusion of any Discourse, is to affirm all that had been said before; we thereby declare and testify our Approbation thereof, and Consent thereto: And it denotes such a sort of Approbation and Consent, as, considering the Nature of the foregoing Discourse, was proper to be given to it.

And therefore when we repeat the Creed, we say *Amen*, at the End of that; by saying which Word there, we grant the Truth of all the Articles before rehears'd, and declare our Belief thereof; there *Amen* signifies, *So it is, this is the true Faith*; or, *All this I stedfastly believe*.

And so, when at the End of every one of those Curses, which were order'd to be pronounced upon Mount Ebal, Deut. xxvii. the People were taught to say, *Amen*; the Design was, that by saying that Word, they should testify, that those Curses, upon such as did the Things there spoken of, were just and deserved, and such as all those wicked Doers might reasonably expect should befall them.

And of the like Use is the Word *Amen*, in the Commination appointed in our Liturgy to be read upon the first Day of Lent; the Design of it (as the Church her self teaches in the Exhortation at the beginning of that Office) is, That the Congregation being admonish'd of the great Indignation of God against Sinners, may be warned to flee from those Vices, for which, by their saying *Amen*, at the End of every Sentence, they affirm with their own Mouths the Curse of God to be due.

And so St. Paul, Rom. i. 25. after he had said of the Heathens, that they worshiped and served the Creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, adds, *Amen*; meaning thereby farther to confirm that last Clause, who is blessed for ever: *Amen*, i. e. he is blessed for ever. And he adds the same Word upon a like Occasion, to almost the same Form of Speech, in the ninth Chapter of that Epistle, at the fifth Verse, only that as in the Words before cited, he had spoken of God the Father, or the first Person in the ever blessed Trinity, he here affirms the same of the second Person, our Lord Jesus Christ; of whom he here says, that he is over all, God blessed for ever: *Whose are the Fathers*, (i. e. they were Jews) and of whom as concerning the Flesh, Christ came, who, (i. e. which Christ,) is over all, God blessed for ever; and then

then he immediately adds the Word, *Amen*, in farther Affirmation of that last Clause, wherein he had asserted the eternal Divinity of the Son; that it might not seem to have been written casually, or without good thinking; *Christ is over all, God blessed for ever: Amen; i.e. so indeed it is; Christ is indeed God blessed for ever.* In both these Texts, the Word *Amen*, has the Force of a Repetition, in one Word, of what had been said just before in more Words.

And of the like Use and Force is the Word *Amen*, when 'tis added at the End of the *Creed*, or of a *Prayer*.

When we say *Amen*, at the End of the *Creed*, or whenever else we make Profession of our Belief of any divine Truth, we mean, by adding that Word, to repeat over again in short, all that Profession of our Faith or Belief, which we had before made in several Words, or in several Sentences. The saying *Amen* there, is equivalent to the saying over again all that had been said before; it is a fresh Declaration of our Consent thereto, and our Belief thereof.

But when the Word *Amen* is joined to a *Prayer*, or is added at the End of a *Prayer*, as it is here, it then serves to express our Wish or Desire, that the whole Matter of the Request, to which it is subjoin'd, may be granted, or our good Hope that the same will be granted. Thus in *1 Kings* i. 36. when *David* had declared his Intention that *Solomon* should succeed him in the Kingdom, *Benaiah* the Son of *Jehoiada* answer'd the King, and said, *Amen, the Lord God of my Lord the King say so too.* Where by this Word *Amen*, he plainly meant to express his Desire that it might be so as the King had said. And thus also, in *Jer.* xxviii. 6. when the Prophet *Hananiah* had prophesied falsely, that the Vessels which *Nebuchadnezzar* had carried from *Jerusalem* to *Babylon*, should in a short Time be brought back again, the Prophet *Jeremiah* said, *Amen*; and yet he knew at the same time that the Prophecy was false; he could not therefore be thought, by saying that Word, to give his Assent to the Truth of it; but nevertheless, because the Matter of the Prophecy was good, and what the Prophet *Jeremiah* would have been as glad as any of them all might be fulfilled, he said *Amen* to it; *i.e.* he declared his own Wish and Desire, that it might be so as *Hananiah* had said, altho' he knew that it would not be so. And so he himself explains the Word; *Jeremiah* said, *Amen; the Lord do so, the Lord perform thy Words which thou hast prophesied.* And so, in *Rev.* xxii. 20. when our Lord had said, *Surely I come quickly,* the Apostle St. *John*, for himself, or in the Name of the whole Christian Church, immediately adds, *Amen; even so, come Lord Jesus; i.e.* May it be so as thou hast promised.

And of the like Use is this Word *Amen*, when it is added at the End of those Benedictions wherewith most of the *Epistles* in the *New Testament* are concluded.

If therefore the *Prayer*, at the Conclusion of which *Amen* is added, be spoken by one, and the *Amen* be spoken by another, as it is commonly in our publick *Prayers*, when the Minister only speaks the whole *Prayer*, and all the People at the End of it say, *Amen*; then they by saying *Amen*, signify their Consent to, and their Concurrence with, the whole *Prayer* that had been utter'd before by the Minister; and their Meaning is the same as when they say in the *Litany*, *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord*: But if the *Amen* be said by the same Person that speaks the *Prayer*; as when we say *Amen* to our own Closet and private *Prayers*, the *Amen* is then a Repetition, in one Word, of all that had been said before, in all the Clauses of the foregoing *Prayer*: 'Tis a fresh breathing forth of all those pious Desires or Affections of the Mind, that had been before more largely expressed.

When therefore we say *Amen* at the End of the *Lord's Prayer*, whether the *Prayer* be spoken by our selves, or another, the Sense we should have in our Minds is this:

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If

If we refer it to the *Invocation*, *Our Father which art in Heaven*, we should mean, " So it is, it is our Father in Heaven, whom we put up our Prayers to, " and no other.

If we refer it to the *Petitions*, we should mean, " So be it, the Lord fulfil " all our Petitions.

Or if we refer it to the *Doxology* immediately preceding, *Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever*; we should mean, as before in the *Invocation*, " So it is, thine indeed is the Kingdom, and the " Power, and the Glory, for ever.

But when this Word *Amen* is added at the End of a Prayer, the Matter whereof we are sure is good and agreeable to God's Will, (as most certainly the Matter of this Prayer is, which was taught us by our Lord himself) then both the foregoing Senses of the Word may well be join'd together, *so it is*, and *so be it*; then by the Word *Amen*, we should not only signify the Concurrence of our own Wishes, but likewise our assured Hope that the same will be granted to us.

And this is the Explication that is given of this Word in the *Church Catechism*, where, after the Scholar had briefly given the Meaning of the foregoing Clauses and Petitions of the Prayer; this and this I desire of God in this Prayer; he is taught to say, *And this I trust he will do, of his Mercy and Goodness, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore I say Amen, so be it.*

And so much for the Meaning of the Word, *Amen*.

But from the Use of this Word, as well as of all the foregoing Clauses in this Prayer, we are also instructed in our Duty. Two Things especially there are, which we may learn from hence.

1. Being here taught by our Lord himself, to say *Amen*, at the End of Prayer, to testify thereby our Consent thereunto, it plainly appears from hence, that the Prayers which are at any Time put up to God in publick, ought to be express'd in such a Language, and in such a Stile, as may be easily understood by all those that are to join therein. For if they do not understand what is said, they can't approve of it, they can't give a rational Consent thereto, they can't say *Amen* to it.

It is highly expedient therefore, nay, it is absolutely necessary, for the Edification of the Church, that the publick Prayers, which are designed for the Use of all, should be suited to the Capacities of all; *i. e.* should be as plain, as easy, as familiar as is possible; that not only all high Flights, and rhetorical Figures and Flourishes should be therein carefully avoided, but likewise all Words that are not of very easy Meaning, and of common Use.

In a Word, the publick Prayers should be such as the Prayers of our Church are, the Words common, the Stile easy, the Sentences short, and the whole Phrase and Composure suited to the Capacities of the meanest.

And this is not only a Commendation of our Liturgy in particular, that it is so form'd and contriv'd, that the meanest of the Congregation may understand our Prayers, and say *Amen* to them; but it is, in general, an Advantage of premeditated or set Forms of Prayer, above those which are conceived *extempore*, that he that pens a Prayer for publick Use, may take Time to study Plainness and Perspicuity, which he that prays *extempore* cannot do. And indeed I am apt to think, that one Reason why some Persons, who are not of the quickest Apprehensions, do more admire these *extempore* Prayers of others, than they do the stated Prayers of the Church, is because they do less understand them; for People are generally most apt to admire that which they do least understand. But above all, it is manifestly most absurd and ridiculous, that the publick Prayers, in which all are to join, should be put up, as they are in the Church of *Rome*, in an unknown Tongue, in a Language not understood, perhaps, by one in twenty, it may be, not by one in an hundred of

the whole Congregation. The Folly and Ridiculousness of which Practice is most evidently shewed in the fourteenth Chapter of the first *Epistle* to the *Corinthians*, by several Arguments, and among others by this, that no Man can wisely and rationally say *Amen*, to a Prayer utter'd by another in an unknown Tongue, at the fifteenth and following Verses. *What is it then, I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen, at thy giving of Thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily, (i.e. thou thy self who understandest the Language which thou speakest in, thou) givest Thanks well, but the other (i.e. he who understands it not) is not edified.* But,

2. When we say *Amen* at the End of any Prayer, or other Address to God, it is supposed, not only that we understood what went before, but that we minded it, and gave good Attention to it; for when we say *Amen* to any Thing, we thereby give our Consent to it, and declare our Approbation of it: And how can we approve of, how can we consent to a Prayer that is spoken, if we do not attend to what is said?

This therefore is another Duty that we are plainly instructed in by this Word, *Amen*; viz. when we are at Prayer, to keep our Mind to our Business, to attend diligently to what we are about, to avoid as much as is possible all wandring Thoughts in Prayer, to be duly affected with every Clause and Sentence of that Prayer which we either speak our selves, or which is spoken by the Minister in the Congregation in our Names, and to have such Thoughts and Desires in our Minds throughout the whole Office, as the Words we are then speaking seem to import we have. For unless we do thus attend to, and are thus affected by what we say, our Service will be nothing else but Lip-Worship, and will be neither acceptable to God nor profitable to our selves. For of all those that *draw near to God with their Mouths, and honour him with their Lips, while their Heart is removed far from him*, we are told by the Prophet, that *their Worship of God is vain.*

Isa. xxix. 13.
comp. Matth.
xv.

But if as every Clause and Sentence of the Prayer is uttered, we go along with it in our Minds, and give such a Consent either of Approbation or Desire, as is proper to be given thereto, then the single Word, *Amen*, at the End of all, being utter'd with Fervency and true Devotion, will fully comprehend in it all the Sense of the whole foregoing Prayer, and we shall pray over again in one devout Breath, as much as we prayed before in the whole Office. And such an effectual fervent Prayer, (as St. James calls it) we may be sure will *avail much* with God. For this (as St. John says) *is the Confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any Thing according to his Will he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the Petitions that we desired of him.*

1 Joh. v. 14,
15.

And now having gone through every Part of the Lord's Prayer by it self, explaining the Meaning thereof, and declaring the Duties that we are thereby instructed in and oblig'd to, I shall only observe two Things to you concerning the Fulness, Perfection, and Excellency of this Prayer, and so conclude. And,

1. From what has been said it is easy to observe that the Lord's Prayer is a complete Pattern of Prayer, there being in this short Prayer every Thing that can be reckon'd a Part of Prayer. For,

(1.) In Prayer we are to *acknowledge* and *adore* the *Divine Excellencies and Perfections*; and this we do here; *first*, in the Preface to the Prayer,

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when

when invoking God, we stile him our heavenly Father, *Our Father which art in Heaven*, and then in the Conclusion of it, when we acknowledge that *his is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory for ever*.

(2.) In Prayer we are humbly to *thank* our heavenly Father for all the Expressions of his Goodness to us; *continue in Prayer*, says the *Apostle*, and watch in the same with *Thanksgiving*. And this Part of Prayer, *Thanksgiving*, is included likewise in the Preface, when we acknowledge that God is *our Father*, *i. e.* that he bears us a fatherly Affection, and that we have experienced his fatherly Kindness to us; and this same is likewise again exercis'd and express'd in the first Petition, *hallowed be thy Name*; that Phrase being, (as I have formerly noted) like those commonly in Use among us, *God be praised, blessed be God*, and the like; by which, though they are express'd in the Form of a Wish or Petition, yet what we mean is, actually to give Thanks and Praise to God; and so it may be understood there, *hallowed be thy Name*; *i. e.* we do hallow thy Name, we praise and bless thee for thy Goodness.

(3.) In Prayer we are humbly to *request* of God the good Things that we want; this is the chief Subject of Prayer, this is what it has its Name from; for Prayer and *Petition* are Words of the same Signification; and this is plainly the chief Subject of the Lord's Prayer; the whole Body of it, all but the Preface and Conclusion, being in its primary Meaning, *Petition* to God for such Things as we have need of (and indeed for all Things that we have need of) both for our Souls and Bodies. But then,

(4.) *Lastly*, It is not fit that vile and polluted Sinners, as we all are, should dare to approach the Presence of God, or presume to offer up any Request to him, without an humble *Acknowledgment of our vileness and unworthiness*: It becomes not Sinners to ask any thing of God without *confessing* their Faults, and sorrowfully owning that they are unworthy to receive the good Things that they ask'd: And this is *Confession*, which therefore ought to make a Part in all our Addresses to God; and so it does here: For when we ask God forgiveness (as we are taught to do in the fifth Petition, *forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive them that trespass against us*) such a Request contains, by plain Implication, an Acknowledgment that we are Sinners; for if we had no Sin, we should need no Pardon, and if we did not think our selves Sinners, we should not think it needful to beg Pardon.

From all which therefore it plainly appears, that this is a most complete Form or Pattern of Prayer, that there is nothing essential to Prayer wanting in it.

2. What may be farther observ'd and infer'd from all the Discourses which I have made upon this Prayer, as to the admirable Excellency and Perfection of it; is, that it is so fram'd and contriv'd, as to serve both for an *Expression* of our *Devotion* towards God, and for an *Instruction* to our selves; that at the same Time, and by the same Words, by which we are taught what to request of God, we are also instructed in our own Duty, and strongly excited to it; upon which Account the frequent Use of it must needs be of singular Benefit and Advantage to us.

You may, I suppose, have heard it said, that no Person that is a Witch, can repeat the Words of the Lord's Prayer throughout; that if such a Person be put to repeat it, there will be always somewhat mistaken in the Repeating it, or somewhat omitted. I will not warrant the Truth of this
Say-

Saying or Observation, because, as I have had no Experience of it, so neither can I see any Reason for it.

But this I think I may say with more certainty of Truth, and with more Reason; that no wicked Man whatsoever, continuing in his Wickedness, can say this Prayer, nor indeed any one Sentence or Clause of it, with good Attention and fervent Devotion; and that every good Man so saying it, must needs by natural Efficacy, as well as by the Divine Grace and Blessing, be rendred better thereby.

1. I say, that a wicked Man, continuing in his Wickedness, can't say this Prayer, nor indeed any one Sentence or Clause of it, with good Attention, and fervent Devotion; he can't have such inward Affections of Mind towards God, as the Words of this Prayer do express, nor an hearty Desire of those Things which he seems to request of God; because such devout Affections and holy Desires are directly contradictory to, and utterly inconsistent with the Love and Practice of Sin.

For how can he presume so much as to call upon God in Prayer, who in Works denies him? Or how can he with holy Devotion call God his *Father*, who has sold himself to the Devil to work Wickedness, and continually exercises himself therein? *For whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself pure, and that wicked one toucheth him not*, as the *Apostle* says.

How can he say to God, with true Devotion, *hallowed be thy Name*, who dishonours him in his whole Life? How can he be thought seriously and heartily to desire that the holy Name of God may be sanctified by all, who is himself by wicked Oaths and horrid Blasphemies, continually prophaning and polluting it? Again,

How can he pray heartily that *the Kingdom of God may come*, and be establish'd in the World, who will not give up himself to be rul'd and govern'd by him? Must not his Heart give his Tongue the Lye, while he says with his Mouth, *thy Kingdom come*, and yet knows himself to be in his Heart with those wicked ones spoken of by *Job*, who say unto God depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of thy Ways; What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what Profit should we have if we pray unto him?

Again; we are taught in this Prayer to say, *thy Will be done in Earth as it is in Heaven*; but how can a Man say this with true and fervent Devotion, who continually opposes and resists the divine Will, who will neither submit to the Providence of God, nor obey his Precepts; who is *abominable and disobedient, and to every good Work reprobate*?

Again; Give us (we are farther taught to say) *this Day our daily Bread*; now in the Matter of this Petition, there is indeed nothing but what a very wicked Man may agree to; for he may desire as earnestly, nay, he does commonly desire more passionately, the Things of this Life than the good Man does: But then as to the Manner of desiring them, as to the craving them of God, he can no more utter this Petition with true Devotion than he can any of the former; because he knows that he does not depend upon God for them, nor expect them from his Blessing, but only from his own Wit and Industry; for if he look'd for them from the divine Blessing, he would not seek them, as now he does, in such Ways as God has forbidden, *i. e.* by Fraud and Injustice, Extortion and Oppression.

And as little can he join, with true and hearty Devotion, in the Petition that follows, *forgive us our Trespases*; for though Pardon of Sins be what he greatly wants, and what, if he has any Sense of Religion in him, he can't but secretly wish God would grant; yet he can't with true Devotion, and with such Assurance of being heard as is requisite to render our Prayers availing,

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put up any Petition to God, the Matter of which we our selves are sensible is highly unreasonable. And what can be more unreasonable than this? What can be more unfit for God to grant, or more prophane and presuming in us to ask, than this is? *viz.* that he would be pleas'd to grant Pardon to an unrepenting Sinner. For to ask this of God, is just the same as it would be to desire him to abrogate all his holy and righteous Laws, or to grant us a License to transgress them.

And as little can such a one say, with a true Spirit of Devotion, and an hearty Concurrence of his own Desire, *lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil*; for, as the *Apostle* says, *every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed*: And this is what the wicked Man chuses to be; he gives himself up to his own Heart's Lusts, and delights to follow his own wicked Imaginations; so that to pray against Temptations is to pray against himself; and he can't be supposed to join heartily in this Petition, without supposing what is plainly impossible; *viz.* that a Man can at the same Time love and hate, chuse and refuse, delight in and abhor, the same Things.

And lastly, when such an one says, *for thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever*; seeming thereby to acknowledge the infinite and adorable Perfections of the divine Nature, and to intend to give him the Praise and Glory that is his due; how can it be supposed that his Heart should go along with his Words, when at the same time that he says these Words, it plainly appears by the whole Course and Tenor of his wicked Life, that he neither owns the sovereign Dominion of God, nor dreads his Power, nor seeks his Glory?

Thus it appears, that a wicked Man, continuing such, can't say this Prayer, nor indeed any Clause or Sentence of it, with good Attention and fervent Devotion; that he can't have such inward Affections of Mind towards God as the Words of this Prayer do express, nor an hearty Desire of those Things which he seems to request of God: Or if he had, he would quickly be a better Man than he is. And this was what I farther said, *viz.*

2. That every good Man, every time he uses this Prayer, with good Attention and fervent Devotion, must needs by natural Efficacy, as well as by the divine Grace and Blessing, be rendred better thereby.

For every time that he calls upon God as his *Father*, he is reminded of that filial Love and Duty which he owes to him.

Every time that he says with a true Spirit of Devotion, *thy Kingdom come*, he is admonished to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*.

Every time that he prays heartily, that *God's Name* may be *hallowed*, his own Mind must needs be filled with an awful Reverence towards him.

Every time he says, if he speaks the Words with Attention and Fervency, *thy Will be done in Earth as it is in Heaven*; he is taught his own Duty, *viz.* humbly to resign himself to God's Pleasure, and with all Readiness and Chearfulness to set himself to obey his Commands.

Whenever he desires of God his *daily Bread*, he exercises an act of Trust in God's Providence, and is warn'd not to use any such Means for the procuring the good Things of this Life, as he can't in Reason expect, or so much as desire God's Blessing upon.

When he begs of God *Forgiveness* of his *Sins*, the Devotion wherewith the Words of this Petition should be accompanied, must be grounded upon the Testimony of his own Conscience, that he is truly penitent, and that he does exercise such Mercy and Charity towards those that have offended him, as God has made the Condition of his own receiving Pardon.

When he desires of God *not to be led into Temptation*, if his Desires are hearty, it can't be supposed that he should wilfully run himself into those Dangers, which he earnestly prays he may avoid or be deliver'd from.

And lastly, when he gives Glory to God, by a solemn Recognition and Acknowledgment of the divine Excellencies and Perfections, saying, *thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever*; if he be at all affected by what he says, it must needs be, that every time he devoutly repeats this Doxology, his love to God must be increased, his Faith strengthened, and his Obedience confirm'd.

Such then being the Excellency of this Prayer, and such the Benefits and Advantages of our religiously and devoutly using it; what remains, but that we pray unto the same blessed *Jesus*, who in Compassion to our Infirmities has taught us how to pray, that he would be pleas'd to send also his holy Spirit to help our Infirmities in Prayer; that so we may always speak these holy Words which he has taught us, with Attention and fervent Devotion, and thereby be made capable of his gracious Promise, who has said, that
 John xiv. 15. *whatsoever we shall ask the Father in his Name he will do for us, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

And to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be given, as is most due, all Honour, Glory, and Praise, now and for evermore. *Amen.*



DISCOURSE LVII.

Of the Nature and Duty of Fasting.

MATTH. VI. 16, 17, 18.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites, of a sad Countenance, for they disfigure their Faces, that they may appear unto Men to fast; Verily I say unto you, they have their Reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy Head, and wash thy Face;

That thou appear not unto Men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.



OUR Saviour, at the first Verse of this Chapter, had given a general Caution against seeking our own Praise and Glory by any good Thing that we do; *Take heed that ye do not your Righteousness before Men to be seen of them.*

And because there are no Acts of Piety and Goodness, by which Men are so apt to design and seek their own Honour, as *Alms, Prayer, and Fasting*, he proceeds in the following Verses to apply his general Caution against Vain glory, to these particular Cases. First, To *Alms*, ver. 2, &c. *Therefore when thou doest thine Alms, do not sound a Trumpet before thee, &c.* Then, to *Prayer*, ver. 5, &c. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the Hypocrites are, who love to pray standing in the Synagogues, and in the Corners of the Street, that they may be seen of Men, &c.* And at last, to *Fasting*, in the Words which I am now to discourse of; *Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites, &c.*

When ye fast: The Phrase and Manner of speaking is the same here that it had been at the second and fifth Verses; *When thou doest thine Alms, and when thou prayest.* Those Words at the 2^d Verse, *when thou doest thine Alms*, are not a Precept or Command to give Alms; neither are those at the fifth Verse, *when thou prayest*, a Precept or Command to make any Prayers to God; but those are both supposed to be Duties, and such Duties too as none that either have any Religion, or pretend to any, can be failing in. And upon that Supposition our Saviour's Advice is grounded, wherein he gives such Cautions and Directions concerning the Manner of giving Alms, and making Prayers, as are necessary to be observ'd, in order to the rendring the Exercise and Practice of these Duties acceptable to God, and profitable to our own Salvation.

And so it is here; our Saviour here gives no direct Precept or Command concerning the Use of *fasting*, but seeming to suppose his Hearers already per-

suaded

suaded of the Usefulness or Necessity of this Exercise, and not to be failing therein, he only takes notice of a great and common Fault in the Manner of doing it, or in the End and Design of doing it, and cautions against that; *when ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites, of a sad Countenance, for they disfigure their Faces, that they may appear unto Men to fast*; and then, as a Means to avoid this Fault, he directs them, when they fasted, to *anoint their Head, and wash their Face, that they might not appear unto Men to fast, but unto their Father in secret*.

And indeed, there was no need, that when our *Saviour* gave the former Cautions against Vain-glory in *Almsgiving* and *Praying*, he should at the same Time expressly prescribe the Duties of *Alms* and *Prayer*, because they are Duties which elsewhere in his other Sermons, and even in this Sermon on the Mount, are very plainly commanded: But in the Matter of *fasting* the Case seems to be otherwise, there being no Text in the *New Testament*, that I know of, that does expressly prescribe and command fasting. So that if this be indeed a necessary Christian Duty, it may seem an Oversight or Omission of our *Saviour*, that he did not here prescribe the *Matter* of the Duty, as well as give Directions concerning the right *Manner* of discharging it: It may be thought that his Discourse upon this Subject would have been more full and complete, if he had first told his Disciples that it was their Duty to fast, before he had cautioned them against Hypocrisy in fasting. And because he has not done this, it may be thought by some to be a Thing altogether needless ever to fast at all. And if indeed there be no Fault in never fasting, and there may be, and oftentimes is, a Fault in fasting, (*viz.* when Men fast either in a wrong Manner, or for a wrong End) it will most probably be thought by a great many, the easiest, as well as the surest Way to avoid all Blame, wholly to omit this Exercise, as altogether needless.

And if it be believed that it is to no purpose ever to fast at all, then I'm sure a Discourse upon these Words of our *Saviour*, wherein he cautions against those Faults which Men are liable to in fasting, and prescribes the Method of fasting in a right manner, will likewise be altogether superfluous; for we need not be concern'd to know, what is the best manner of doing a Thing which needs not to be done at all.

And therefore before I come to speak of the Caution and Direction here given us by our *Saviour*, concerning the *Manner* of fasting, I think it will be needful to say somewhat concerning the *Matter* of it, or the Work it self, and the Obligation that lies upon us to the Exercise and Discharge of it; which I shall do in this Method.

- I. I shall shew what fasting is.
- II. I shall enquire what Obligation is laid upon us to fast.
- III. I shall shew what good Purposes fasting ministers to, what good Ends it serves for. And,
- IV. I shall shew what are the proper Times and Occasions of fasting.

I. I shall shew what fasting is. And,

1. The Word is sometimes us'd for an *Abstinence* from *pleasant Food*, and for very *moderate* and *sparing Feeding*, even on those sorts of Meats which are reckon'd mean and ordinary, or little nourishing.

And 'tis suppos'd by some, that it was such a Fast as this which was kept by Queen *Esther*, and which she order'd the *Jews* that were in *Shushan* to keep, *Est. iv. 16. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three Days, Day or Night, and I also, and my Maidens will fast likewise.* Neither eat nor drink for three Days, *i. e.* says *Grotius* upon the Place, approving the Interpretation

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that

that *Josephus* had before given of it, she commanded them to abstain from all pleasant or delicate Meat and Drink for that Time; for that they did wholly abstain from all Manner of Meat and Drink, for three whole Days, Day and Night, is hardly credible. And much less is it credible, that *David*, when he fasted and prayed for *seven Days* together, for the Life of the Child which he had by the Wife of *Uriah* the *Hittite*, as it is said he did, 2 *Sam.* xii. 16, 18. (It is, I say, by no means credible, that *David* in all those seven Days, at the End of which the Child died, and after which it is said that he did arise and eat Bread) did wholly abstain from taking any Food at all: But the Meaning most probably is, that he did eat no set Meal; and that what he did eat was the plainest and coarsest Food, it may be nothing but Bread and Water, and that he took even of those no more than was just absolutely necessary to support Life. And such a Fast as this *Daniel* kept for *three Weeks* together, *Dan.* x. 2, 3. *In those Days I Daniel was mourning three full Weeks, I ate no pleasant Bread, neither came Flesh nor Wine in my Mouth, neither did I anoint my self at all, 'till three whole Weeks were fulfilled.* But this is not properly Fasting, but it may rather be called Abstinence. For,

2. Fasting, if we take the Word in its strictest Sense, is a total Forbearance of all Meat and Drink, during the Time that the Fast continues; and antiently the Continuance of a Fast was from Morning until Evening. Thus *David* declaring his Intention to keep a Fast for the Death of *Abner*, 2 *Sam.* iii. 35. expresses it thus; *God do so to me, and more also, if I taste Bread, or ought else, 'till the Sun be down.* And this is the proper Meaning of the Greek Word that is used in the Text, *νηστεύειν*; it signifies, not to eat; so that then we properly fast, when we deny our selves for a Time the necessary Recruits and Refreshments of Nature. And this is clearly intimated in that Question that was put by the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, to our Saviour, *Luke* v. 33. *Why do the Disciples of John fast often, — and likewise the Pharisees, but thine eat and drink?* which in *St. Mark* is thus expressed, *but thy Disciples fast not*; by comparing which Places it appears, that the only Notion they had of Fasting, was an Abstinence from Meat and Drink. They that did eat and drink, whatever it was that they did eat and drink, were not then thought to fast: There was no such Thing then known as the keeping of a Fast, only by forbearing to eat Flesh, while in the mean Time they did eat and drink to the full, of the most delicious Fish, and of the richest and choicest Wines. But when the Fast was only of one Day, they abstain'd from all Sort of Food and Drink 'till the Evening, and then took no more of either, than was necessary to support Nature; and that too of such Food as was least palatable and nourishing. And it is not improbable, that those longer Fasts before-mention'd, of seven Days, and of three Weeks, were kept after the same Manner; *i. e.* not that in all that Time the Persons spoken of, *David* and *Daniel*, did take no Sustenance at all, but that they kept every Day of those seven Days, or three Weeks, in such Manner as a single Fasting-day was wont to be kept; *i. e.* by eating only very sparingly, and of the least delicious and nourishing Food, and of that too not 'till the Evening, or the going down of the Sun. This was Fasting; and I believe in the whole Scripture we can find no other Notion of Fasting but this. I proceed now in the second Place,

Ex vi Priv. &
20/10 edo.

II. To shew what Obligation is laid upon us to fast: *When thou fastest, says our Saviour, thou shalt not do as the Hypocrites; but let thy Fast be in secret.* These Words, as I noted before, do not respect the Matter, but only the Manner of Fasting: They do not lay an Obligation upon us to fast, but suppose such an Obligation laid upon us before. For it is not

said, *if ye fast*; that Way of speaking might have been thought to have left it to our Liberty, whether we would ever fast or no: But, *when ye fast*. 'Tis just as he had said before, *when ye give Alms*, and, *when ye pray*. But now concerning *Alms* and *Prayer* there is no doubt but that they are Duties; what Reason then can there be to think, that *Fasting* is not so too, which according to the Scheme of Speech here used by our *Saviour*, is as plainly suppos'd to be a Duty as either of them? And indeed, unless *Fasting* be a Duty, it will be a Thing unaccountable, our *Saviour's* giving express Directions concerning the Manner of performing a Service, that, without incurring any blame at all, may be wholly omitted.

But the Case was this; our *Saviour* found *Fasting* already practis'd among the *Jews*, as duly as *Alms* and *Prayer*; so that there was no need of his laying again the Foundation which had been laid before; it was more proper for him, especially in this Place, to build upon it. And indeed it would have been a sufficient Approbation of the Practice of such *Fasting*, as our *Saviour* found exercis'd among the *Jews*, and esteem'd by them a Piece of Religion, and of acceptable Service to God, if having Occasion to mention it, he had not forbidden or condemn'd it; which certainly he would have done, had it been a Thing superstitious, not requir'd by God, or not pleasing to him. But when he supposes that his Disciples, according to the Example of all other pious Persons, both then and in former Times, would practise *Fasting*; and when upon this Supposition, he gives them Directions how to fast, so as to make their *Fasting* profitable to themselves, and acceptable to God; this is more than a negative Approbation of it; such a Direction concerning the Manner of doing a Thing, hath in it the Force of a Commandment to do the Thing concerning which such Direction is given.

Jonah iii.

Especially, when the Practice of *Fasting*, which our *Saviour* found among the *Jews*, was not only grounded upon express Precepts given to the *Jews*, particularly upon that positive Institution of a solemn Fast to be observed every Year upon the *tenth Day of the seventh Month*, mention'd in *Lev. xvi. 29.* and upon that more general Exhortation of the Prophet *Joel*, enjoining it as a proper Expression of Sorrow and Humiliation for Sin, and a fit Exercise to accompany Prayer for Pardon, *Joel ii. 12. Turn unto me with all your Heart, and with Fasting, and with Weeping, and with Mourning*; but had been also taught by the Light of Reason, to those who had received no express Command concerning it. For thus we read of the *Ninevites*, an *Heathen Nation*, that when the Prophet *Jonah* was sent to them to prophesy the Destruction of their City, this was the Means they took to avert the Judgment; and a very successful Means it prov'd to them; they humbled themselves before God with Prayer and *Fasting*, Sackcloth and Ashes, and all other natural and usual Tokens and Expressions of a sincere Sorrow for their former wickedness; and *when God saw their Work, and that they turned from their evil Way, he repented of the Evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.* And of *Tyre* and *Sidon* two *Heathen Cities*, who had no positive Precept given to them by divine Revelation, our *Saviour* says, *Matth. xi. 21.* that if the mighty Works which had been done in *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida*, had been done among them, *they would have repented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes, i. e. they would have repented with Fasting.* And it has been always a Custom among all Nations, as well as among the *Jews*, to use *Fasting* as a proper Expression of their Repentance, and as a Means, being joyned with earnest Prayer, to appease the Anger of God, and to avert or remove his Judgments. Now whence could they learn this Custom but from the Light of Reason, when they had no Precept given them concerning it by divine Revelation? And how should there come to be such a general Consent and Agreement among
all

all Nations in this Practice; but only that this Way of afflicting the Body by Fasting, and such like Hardships and Austerities, did appear to all a very natural Way of expressing and shewing forth the inward Sorrow and Affliction of the Mind?

When therefore the Practice of Fasting, which our *Saviour* found in Use among the *Jews*, had been so well grounded, both upon natural Reason, and positive Institution, our *Saviour's* saying to his Disciples, *when ye fast, do it after this Manner*, was a sufficient Intimation to them, that they ought to continue the Custom of Fasting, as well as a Command to observe those Directions which he gives them concerning the right Manner of Fasting.

But this is not the only Ground of our Obligation to fast, that it was a Custom that had been in the World long before, and which our *Saviour* taking Notice of, did not reprove or condemn, but rather recommend, by building an *evangelical* Precept thereupon concerning the right Manner of fasting: For even from the *New Testament* it self, though there is in it no express Precept or Command to fast, as there is to pray, and to give Alms, there may yet be several Arguments drawn, to prove, that fasting, if it be perform'd for a good End, and after a right Manner, is a good Work, and very acceptable to God. For,

(1.) There are in the *New Testament* several Examples of fasting mention'd, with Commendation given thereto. For,

Thus of *Anna* the Prophetess, it is recorded by *St. Luke*, in her Commendation, *Luke ii. 37. that she departed not from the Temple, but served God with Fasting and Prayer, Night and Day.*

And of *Cornelius* the Centurion, 'tis said in *Acts x. 2. that he was a devout Man, and one that feared God*; and then, as an Instance of his Devotion and Religion, it is farther mention'd, that on that Day on which he receiv'd the heavenly Vision to send for *St. Peter*, *he was fasting until the ninth Hour*, (*i. e.* at three in the Afternoon, for the *Jews* began their Day at six in the Morning,) *Verse 30. Four Days ago*, says he, *I was fasting until this Hour, and at the ninth Hour I prayed in my House.*

And *St. Paul* mentions it as one, of those Things, wherein, if it had been expedient for him to boast, he might with better Reason have gloried, than some others did in other things, that he was *in fastings often*, *2 Cor. xi. 27.* And in the sixth Chapter of the same *Epistle*, *Verse 5* he mentions fasting among several other things, whereby he himself, and the other Apostles, did approve themselves as Ministers, *i. e.* as the true Servants of God.

(2.) To fasting, though the same be not expressly commanded, there is in the *New Testament* a special Virtue and Efficacy attributed. For thus, *Mark ix. 29.* when the Disciples had ask'd our *Saviour*, why they could not cast forth the Devil out of the Child which had been brought to them in his Absence, he said unto them; *this Kind can come forth by nothing but by Prayer and Fasting.* By which it clearly appears, that Prayer with Fasting is more prevalent and efficacious than Prayer alone; and that there is nothing fit for us to ask, or God to grant, but what may be obtain'd this Way; *viz.* by Prayer and Fasting.

(3.) Lastly, it may be farther observ'd, that though fasting be not here, nor any where else in the *New Testament*, expressly enjoin'd, yet so much is said of it, even here in the Text, from whence it may be very solidly and strongly argued to be a Duty. For we are not rewarded by God for any Thing but for the doing of our Duty, for performing some such Service as is pleasing and acceptable to him: But that we shall be rewarded for our fasting, if we fast for a good End, and after a right Manner, we are here expressly told by our Lord; *When thou fastest, anoint thy Head, and wash thy*

thy Face, that thou appear not unto Men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Now, I think there can be no doubt, but that *that* is a good Work, and acceptable to God, which he himself has engag'd thus to reward.

But after all that has been said of the Obligation that is laid upon us to fast, and the acceptableness thereof, it must be granted (as the *Apostle* says) *1 Tim. iv. 8. that bodily Exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable to all Things.*

Fasting therefore is no otherwise an acceptable piece of Service to God, than is any other outward sign and shew of Contrition, or Expression of Devotion, or Means of Virtue: *i. e.* 'Tis then, as all other outward Acts of Religion are, acceptable, when there is such an inward Contrition in the Mind as we make shew of; when we have as much inward Devotion as we seem to express; and when we use the outward Means proper for the avoiding any Sin, or acquiring any Virtue, with a sincere Design and Intention to improve our selves thereby in Grace and Virtue.

Fasting therefore is a Thing encourag'd and commended, not for its own sake, but for somewhat else; 'tis not the *end* that we are to rest in, but it is to be us'd as a *Means* in order to some other End. Considered in it self, merely as it is a forbearing to take so much Nourishment, as 'tis ordinarily requisite for the Health of the Body we should take, there is no Virtue or Praise in it. For it is a Matter merely indifferent, whether we eat, or whether we eat not; provided that when we eat, we eat not to excess, and that when we forbear eating, it be not to the prejudice of our Health. But fasting is then good, when it ministers to good Purposes, and when it serves for some good End.

This therefore was the next Thing propounded; *viz.*

3. To shew, what good Purposes fasting ministers to, what good Ends it serves for. By the Consideration of which it will also appear, of what Sort and Kind the Fast ought to be, which we keep for any of the Purposes for which fasting is useful. And,

(1.) One end and purpose of religious Fasting is to subdue the carnal Desires of the Flesh, to tame the unruly Appetites of the Body. Thus *St. Paul* says of himself, *1 Cor. ix. 27. I keep under my Body, and bring it into subjection.* And that his frequent fastings, which he elsewhere mentions, were a Means which he used in order to this End, seems clearly enough intimated at the twenty fifth Verse of that Chapter, in those Words, *Every Man that striveth for the Mastery is temperate in all Things;* for then it follows, *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the Air; but I keep under my Body, (viz. by Temperance or Abstinence) and bring it into subjection.* For there is no greater Enemy to Chastity than full and plentiful feeding. *When I fed them to the full,* says God by the Prophet, *they then committed Adultery, and assembled themselves by Troops in the Harlots Houses, Jer. v. 7.* And therefore the *Apostle* in *Rom. xiii. 13.* joins together, as sins which are seldom separate, *rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness;* and as a Means to avoid the latter, *viz. all the sins of Unchastity,* directs in the next Verse, *not to make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.*

But he that uses fasting as a Means of Chastity, must not think, that this unclean Devil will be cast forth by his now and then missing a meal's Meat, while at other times he feeds to the full, or perhaps to Excess: No; the proper Fasting for this purpose is a State of Fasting, or an habitual Fasting; it is what may perhaps be better call'd Abstinence than Fasting; 'tis not the now and then missing a Meal, but a constant spare Diet, and that too of such sort of Food as is least delicate and nourishing.

(2.) Another good End of religious Fasting, is to maintain the Dominion of the Soul over the Body, and all the Cravings and Appetites thereof; to get the Mastery over our selves, by frequent Acts of Self-denial.

And the Fasting proper for this purpose is the abstaining, if not constantly, at least very frequently, from those sorts of Meats and Drinks, which are most pleasing and delightful to the Palate, which we are most apt to hanker after, or indulge our selves in. For thus accustoming our selves to cross our own Appetites in some Things, it will be the easier for us to cross them in others; and not using to indulge our selves in the Gratifications of Sense, when we sit at a full Table, and may chuse what Dish likes us best, it will be the easier for us to bear a Change of our Condition for the worse, with Patience and Cheerfulness.

(3.) Another good End of Fasting, or otherwise denying our selves those Satisfaction which we might lawfully have taken, is to exercise a Revenge upon our selves for our Sins. By a voluntary suffering of Hunger and Thirst, in a just Indignation against our selves for our former Excesses, or for any other notorious Transgression of the divine Laws, we pass Judgment on our selves as unworthy of the least of God's Mercies; we own, as it were, that we do not deserve so much as the Bread we eat; that if God should deal with us according to our Doings, he might justly withdraw from us even the Necessaries of preserving Life. And therefore in ancient Times, with Fasting they usually join'd other corporal Austerities and Mortifications, to make it more afflicting to the Body; they wore Sackcloth next their Skin, and covered their Heads with Ashes, and lay upon the Ground; and in all other respects us'd their Bodies very hardly and roughly. And hence Fasting is many times in Scripture call'd, *afflicting one's self*. Thus, *Levit. xvi. 29.* where the great Fast of Expiation is instituted, 'tis thus express'd, *In the seventh Month, on the tenth Day of the Month, ye shall afflict your Souls.* And *I, says Ezra, chap. viii. ver. 2. proclaimed a Fast, that we might afflict our selves before God.* And the Psalmist, speaking of himself, says, *Psal. xxxv. 13. I wept, and chastened my self with Fasting.*

And that this is a natural Fruit of a sincere Sorrow for Sin, and a proper Expression thereof, is clearly intimated by the Apostle, *2 Cor. vii. 11.* where, among other Things whereby the Sorrow of the *Corinthians* was manifested to be a true godly Sorrow, he instances particularly in this Fruit or Expression of it; *Yea, what Indignation it wrought in you; yea, what Revenge?* And of those that do thus judge themselves, the same Apostle says, *1 Cor. xi. 31.* that they shall not be judged of the Lord. Such voluntary afflicting and chastening our selves, (when it is not counterfeited, but is the true Effect of a godly Sorrow for Sin, and of a just Anger and Indignation against our selves for our own Folly) tho' it be not properly propitiatory, or satisfactory to the Justice of God, yet answers the End that he designs by temporal Judgments, upon Sinners; and so many times moves him to forbear sending down those Judgments which otherwise he would have sent, for the Manifestation of his Justice, Power, and Providence. A notable Example of which we have in *Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 29.* And it came to pass when *Ahab* heard those Words; i. e. the Judgment that was given against him in the Name of God, by the Prophet *Elijah*, from the nineteenth to the twenty fifth Verses of that Chapter; (*When Ahab heard those Words*) he rent his Cloaths, and put Sackcloth upon his Flesh, and fasted, and lay in Sackcloth, and went softly: And then it follows, *And the Word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his Days, but in his Sons Days will I bring the Evil upon his House.*

Now when the Fast is intended for this purpose; *i.e.* for the Chastning or Punishment of our selves, it is necessary that it should be such a Forbearance of Meats and Drinks, or other Comforts of Life, as is really in some good degree painful and uneasy to us: And the Length and Strictness of the Fast ought to be proportioned to the Heinousness or Scandal of those Sins for which we mean thereby to humble and chasten our selves before God.

(4.) Lastly, Another good Purpose which Fasting serves for, is, that it is a good Means and Help to Devotion, and gives us great Assistance in Prayer.

This Fruit we find in Fasting or Emptiness in all other Exercises and Employments of the Mind, especially in such as require close and intense Thinking. Every Man finds himself readier and fitter for such Employments, when he is fasting, than when he is full. And therefore it has been the Custom of the Church of God in all Ages, and not only of the Church, but of those out of the Church too, who had nothing but natural Reason to direct them, to join Fasting to their solemn Exercises of Devotion upon extraordinary Occasions. Thus did the *Ninevites* before spoken of; when *Jonah* had foretold the Destruction of their City, they ordered solemn Prayers for the averting of the Judgment; and that their Prayers might be more intense and fervent, and so the more likely to avail, they join'd *Fasting* with them; as you may see, *Jonah* iii. 6, 8. The same also did the *Jewish Church*, upon the like Occasions, as may be seen in several Places of the *Old Testament*. And the same Custom has been also continued in the *Christian Church*, and was observ'd by the *Apostles* themselves. For they *fasted and prayed*, when they laid Hands on *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Acts* xiii. 3. And they *prayed with Fasting*, when they ordain'd Elders in the Churches of *Lystra* and *Iconium*, *Acts* xiv. 23. And *St. Paul*, when he was stricken to the Earth by the glorious Apparition of our *Saviour*, continued *fasting and praying three Days*, until *Ananias* was sent to comfort him, *Acts* ix. 9, 11. And many other Places might be produc'd to the same purpose.

And such Fasting as is proper for this End, is so much Abstinence from Meats and Drinks, as may serve to keep the Head clear and awake, that so when *the Spirit is willing*, the *Flesh* also may be ready to do its Part, and to keep Company with the Soul in all its Exercises of Devotion. And for this purpose it is sufficient that we abstain from the ordinary Repasts and Refreshments of Nature, till the solemn Office of Devotion is over; and that we never at other Times eat or drink to Surfeiting or Drunkenness, or in such Abundance, as to be at any time unfit for Prayer and Devotion, whenever there is a proper Occasion for it.

I proceed now in the fourth and last Place,

4. To shew, what are the proper Times and Occasions for Fasting. Our *Saviour*, in the Text, only says, *when ye fast*, but he does not say, *when* we should fast, or *how often*, or *to what degree*. Neither indeed can there be any Rules or Directions given concerning this, but only in general, such as these.

(1.) It is certainly the Duty of all the private Members of any Church to fast, (if their Health will permit it) when general Fasting is commanded by publick Authority. But this not being the Fasting here spoken of by our *Saviour*, (for it would be improper and indecent, at such a Time to *anoint the Head*, and to *wash the Face*, that we might *not appear unto Men to fast*) I shall at present say no more of it.

(2.) Therefore a proper Occasion of *private Fasting* (of which only 'tis that our *Saviour* here speaks) is, when we have at any time been overtaken by a Temptation, and fallen into any great Sin, by which we have provok'd the Anger of God against us, and for which we may justly fear the Effects of his Displea-

Displeasure, unless we timely humble our selves before him, in a Sight and Sense of our great Wickedness, and by voluntarily afflicting our selves, and crying mightily for Pardon, can prevail with him to be reconcil'd to us, and forgive us. And to this we are encourag'd by those Words of the *Apostle* before cited, 1 Cor. xi. 31. *If we would judge our selves, we should not be judged.*

(3.) Publick and national Wickedness, if it be not frequently or sufficiently enough bewail'd and lamented by Fasts appointed by publick Authority, is likewise a just Occasion for private Persons to keep private Fasts to God. *Rivers of Waters run down mine Eyes, because Men keep not thy Law,* says the *Psalmist*, *Psal. cxix. 136.* And indeed, when the Wickedness of a Nation is very great, and cries aloud to Heaven for Vengeance, there is no way but this, for any private Member of it to clear himself from the publick Pollution, and to save himself from the common Destruction; as we may learn from these Words in *Ezek. ix. 4, 5, 6.* *And the Lord said unto him, that had the Writer's Inkhorn by his Side, Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a Mark upon the Foreheads of the Men that sigh, and that cry for all the Abominations that be done in the midst thereof; and to the others, that had the destroying Weapons in their Hands, he said, —Go ye after him through the City, and smite; let not your Eye spare, neither have ye Pity; slay utterly old and young —but come not near any Man upon whom is the Mark.*

(4.) Fasting, either publick or private, is still more seasonable and requisite, when there is apparent Danger of being overtaken by the divine Judgment, when the Judgment is threatned, or the Signs and Prognosticks of it do plainly appear. 'Twas upon this Occasion that *Queen Esther* order'd a solemn Fast to the *Jews* in *Shushan*, because the King's Letters were gone forth for the Destruction of their whole Nation: That the King of *Nineveh* proclaim'd a Fast, because *Jonah* had foretold the Destruction of the City: And that *David* kept a seven Days Fast, because his Adultery had been threatned to be punished with the Death of his Infant Child.

(5.) It is still more necessary to humble our selves before God with Fasting, when the Judgment that we feared is actually come upon us. When God is punishing us for our Sins, whether publick or private, national or personal, it highly becomes us to humble our selves under the mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time. 'Twas upon this Occasion, that *Nehemiah* kept a Fast of several Days, *Neh. i. 4.* He had been told by *Hanani*, the miserable State of *Jerusalem*; and when I heard those Words, says he, *I sat down and wept, and mourned certain Days, and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven.* And 'twas upon a like Occasion that *Daniel* kept a Fast, *Dan. ix. 3.* *I understood, says he, by Books, that God would accomplish seventy Years in the Desolations of Jerusalem; and I set my Face unto the Lord God, to seek by Prayer and Supplication, with Fasting, and Sackcloth, and Ashes.* And in general, that any great Loss or Affliction is a proper Occasion of Fasting, is clearly intimated in those Words of our Saviour, *Matth. ix. 15.* where, to the Disciples of *John*, who had question'd him, why his Disciples then did not fast so much, and so often, as the other *Jews* commonly did? he gives this Answer, *Can the Children of the Bridechamber mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the Days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

(6.) Lastly, Whenever there is Occasion for more solemn Prayers and Supplications, whether for the averting some Evil that we fear, or for the removing some Evil that lies heavy upon us, or for the obtaining the divine Direction, Assistance, or Blessing, in any Business or Affair that is of great Moment and Consequence, to our Selves, our Friends, or the Publick, with re-

spect

spect either to this Life, or to another; the same is also a good Occasion and a proper Opportunity for Fasting; that so thereby our Souls being more humbled before God, and our Devotions rendred more intense and fervent, we may have the better Hope that our Prayers will be availing; *for the effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man, we are sure, availeth much.*

And I think it very proper, at this time, to take notice, that for this Reason our Church, agreeably to the Practice of the *Apostles* before observ'd, who fasted and prayed before they laid on Hands, and to the Custom and Canons of the ancient Church, hath wisely appointed some Days in the Weeks call'd *Ember-Weeks*; (i. e. the Weeks before those four *Sundays* which are design'd for the solemn and publick Ordination of Ministers) to be observed as Days of Fasting or Abstinence. For indeed there is nothing wherein the whole Body of *Christians* is more nearly concern'd, than in the Fitness and good Qualification of those Persons who are admitted to minister in holy Offices; there are consequently no Petitions wherein 'tis more requisite they should join with the greatest Fervency and Devotion, than in those which our Church orders at these Times, to be put up unto God; viz. That he would so guide and govern the Minds of his Servants, the Bishops and Pastors of his Flock, that they may lay Hands suddenly on no Man, but faithfully and wisely make Choice of fit Persons to serve in the sacred Ministry of his Church; and that to those which are ordained to any holy Function, he would give his Grace and heavenly Benediction, that both by their Life and Doctrine they may set forth his Glory, and set forward the Salvation of all Men. So far therefore as Fasting or Abstinence is a Help to Devotion, it can never be more fitly prescribed, or more seasonably practis'd, than at these Times.

And so much may suffice to have been spoken concerning the Nature of Fasting, the Obligation that lies upon us to fast, the good Purposes it serves for, and the proper Seasons and Occasions of it.

I proceed now to discourse somewhat concerning the Caution here given us by our Saviour, to avoid Hypocrisy in Fasting. *When ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites, of a sad Countenance; for they disfigure their Faces, that they may appear unto Men to fast; verily I say unto you, they have their Reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy Head, and wash thy Face, that thou appear not unto Men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

And upon this Subject I shall not need to say much, because this is exactly the same Caution that had been given before, in general, at the first Verse, *Take heed that ye do not your Righteousness before Men, to be seen of them;* and which had been before particularly apply'd to the Case of *Alms*, at the second Verse, and to the Case of *Prayer*, at the fifth Verse, and as much in the same Words as the Difference of the Subjects spoken of would permit. [“ So “ that I suppose there is nothing more needful to be said upon this Occasion, “ than has been said already in speaking to those Words; neither, I believe, “ can much be said to the Purpose, without repeating the same Things that “ have been spoken already.]

Two Things only therefore I shall briefly note concerning this Matter, and so conclude.

1. That the Phrases here us'd, of *hiding or disfiguring the Face*, in the time of Fasting, (which thing our Saviour here reproveth,) and of *anointing the Head*, and *washing the Face*, at such a time, (which things he seems here to command,) allude to the Custom and Manner of the *Jews*, and other *Eastern Nations*, ordering themselves in a time of Mourning, or in a time of Rejoicing; so that the Sense of these Phrases is what must be attended to, and not merely the Words or Expressions.

They, in a time of Mourning, did use to veil, or hide their Faces; and in a time of Rejoicing, (and indeed at all times, unless they were in Sorrow or Affliction,) they us'd much washing or anointing. So that when our *Saviour* here seems to forbid the one, and to command the other, His Meaning is no more than this, That we should not use any Artifice to make Men believe that we are more sorrowful and afflicted for our Sins, than we really are: But that when we fast, we should (both as a means to avoid seeking Praise and Glory to our selves, by our Acts of Mortification and Self-denial, and also as a Security to our selves, that we do not seek it, but that our Intentions are honest and sincere) hide our inward Sorrow as much as we can from the Eyes of Men, by putting on the same Look, and wearing the same Dress, that we do at other times, and appearing in all other respects just as we commonly use to do.

2. The other thing that I shall observe concerning this Matter, is this, that the Caution and Direction here given by our *Saviour* concerning Fasting, belong only to those private and voluntary Fasts, which Men keep by themselves, not to those which are order'd to be kept by the publick Authority of the Church or Nation to which they belong. For when general Fasting is enjoin'd by publick Authority, then the Rules of Fasting that are given by the same Authority must also be observ'd: And 'tis then the Duty of all the private Members of the Church or Nation, not only to fast (if the State of their Health will permit it,) but likewise to *appear unto Men* to fast, and to let it be seen that they do fast; thereby both to shew their ready Submission to the Wisdom and Authority of their Superiors, and also to give a good Example to others.

But when we fast at other times, and upon other Occasions, and of our own proper Motion only, (which there may be sometimes good Reason for,) then the Caution and Direction here given by our *Saviour*, are to be carefully observ'd, *viz. not to endeavour to appear unto Men to fast, but unto our Father which is in secret*: And the Benefit of such Fasting will be, that *our Father which seeth in secret will reward us openly*.

I shall conclude all with a good Collect of our Church, suitable to the Subject I have been discoursing of: *And appointed to be used at this Time.*

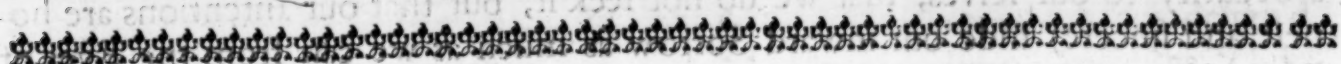
Collect for the first Sunday in Lent.

O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty Days and forty Nights, give us Grace to use such Abstinence, that our Flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly Motions, in Righteousness and true Holiness; to thy Honour and Glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, World without End. Amen.



DISCOURSE LVIII.

Solicitude for this World censured.



MATT H. VI. 19, 20, 21:

*Lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth,
where Moth and Rust doth corrupt, and where
Thieves break thro' and steal.*

*But lay up for your selves Treasure in Heaven, where
neither Moth, nor Rust doth corrupt, and where
Thieves do not break thro' nor steal.*

*For where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be
also.*



IN these Words our Saviour begins to treat of a new Subject, perfectly distinct from what he had been discoursing of in the former Part of the Chapter; for hitherto his main Design had been to caution his Disciples against *Vain-glory*; but what he now cautions them against, is *Covetousness*, or an inordinate Love of the World, and of the good Things of it; and upon this Subject he continues his Discourse to the End of the Chapter; enjoining them, 1. to mortify their Desires of worldly *Wealth* and *Abundance*; *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*: And, 2. to be very moderate in their Care and Concern even about the *Necessaries* of Life, Meat, Drink, and Cloaths; *therefore I say unto you, take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.* The former is what he does in the Words I have now read to you, and in the following verses to the twenty fifth; the latter in the remaining Part of the Chapter; urging, as he goes along, several Motives and Arguments to enforce the Directions which he gives for the avoiding both these Things; *i. e.* both a covetous Desire of Wealth, and an inordinate Care and Solicitude even about the *Necessaries* of Life. 1. He cautions us against a covetous Desire of *Wealth*, in the Words which I have now read to you, and the three following verses, *lay not up, &c.*—

In which Words there is,

I. A Prohibition, or a Sin forbidden, *lay not up, &c.* And this Prohibition of Covetousness, enforced by an Argument taken from the uncertainty of worldly Riches; from the hazard there is of their being spoiled or lost; *where Moth and Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves break through and steal.*

II. There is a contrary Duty commanded; *but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven*; and the Practice of this Duty enforced by an Argument taken from the Consideration of the certainty and durableness of the heavenly Riches; *where neither Moth nor Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through and steal.* And,

III. There is another Argument or Motive urged, respecting both Parts of the foregoing Exhortation, and whereby both the Prohibition and the Command are alike enforced; *for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also.*

I shall speak of these in their order; and first of the First.

I. The Prohibition, or the Sin forbidden, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*: And the proper Argument whereby this Prohibition is enforced, taken from the Considerations of the uncertainty of worldly Riches, from the hazard that there is of their being spoiled or lost; *where Moth, &c.* — And here I shall speak,

I. Of the Prohibition, or the Sin forbidden, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth.*

Which Words may be taken in two Senses; *viz.* either,

1. As forbidding us to *esteem as Treasure, i. e.* to set a high Value upon any thing that we have, or can have, or possess here upon Earth. Or,

2. As forbidding us to make it our *Design and Business* to endeavour to get and keep for our selves as large a Portion as we can of *worldly Riches.*

The former is a Fault or Error in the Judgment, the other is a Fault or Vice in Practice, which that erroneous Judgment or Opinion does really lead us into.

1. I say these Words of our Lord, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, may be understood as forbidding a Fault or Error in the Judgment; they may be understood as forbidding us to *esteem as Treasure, i. e.* to set a very high Value and Esteem upon any thing that we have, or can have here upon Earth; *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*: In the Greek it is *μη θησαυριζετε*, *treasure not to your selves earthly Treasures*: Now we may *lay up* in a prudent Provision against future necessary Occasions, but to *treasure up* signifies more, a *Treasure* is properly what we mean to keep, not what we design to use; so that when we are forbidden to *treasure up* to our selves *Treasure upon Earth*; the meaning is, that we should not look upon any thing that can be stored up of worldly Goods, as a valuable Treasure, as a Thing well worth our utmost Diligence in gathering together and hoarding up, and our greatest Care in keeping and preserving: And to this Interpretation of the Words, that Reason is very apposite, which is added in the twenty first verse; *for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also*; that is, what you have a high Value for in your Judgments, you will naturally bend your Design and Endeavour to obtain.

Taken in this Sense, these Words of our Lord, *treasure not to your selves Treasures upon Earth*, are of the same Meaning with those of St. John, 1 Epist. ii. 15. *love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World*: And the Reason here added to enforce the Prohibition, *for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also*; is the same in Sense with that, whereby the Apostle there backs that Advice; *If any Man love the World, the love of the Father is not in him*; *i. e.* a very high Esteem and Value for any thing in this World, will of Course lessen our Esteem and Value for those good things which God hath prepared for, and promised to those that love him, in the other World: Placing our Happiness in these earthly Enjoyments,

ments, we shall rest there, and look no farther. We shall have no Concern upon us, to keep the Laws of God, (which is the Scripture Sense of loving God) and thereby recommending our selves to his Love. Or,

2. These Words, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, may be understood as forbidding that Fault or Vice in Practice, which this erroneous Judgment, this setting too great a Value upon earthly Treasures, does naturally lead to, *viz.* the making it our *Design* and *Business*, to endeavour to *get* and *keep* for our selves as large a Portion as we can of *worldly Riches*: *Lay not up, store not up, for your selves Treasures upon Earth.*

Which Words nevertheless are not to be understood as designing wholly to forbid either the Possession of Riches, or the least Desire or Endeavour to obtain the same.

1. I say, they are not to be understood as designing wholly to forbid the Possession of worldly Riches.

For it is agreeable to the Will of God, that there should be great Difference in Mens Conditions; that some should be higher, and others lower; that some should be richer, and others poorer; and by this Disparity in Men's Conditions, they are rendred more useful and serviceable to each other, than they could be, if they were all in the same Level: And by that Dependence upon each other, which is caused by the Disparity that there is in their worldly State, their mutual Love to each other is very much increased, and the Peace and Welfare of the Society much better preserved, than it could be in a State of perfect Equality.

And in this Sense those Words of the *Wise-Man* may be understood in *Prov. xxii. 2. The Rich and Poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all; i. e.* He is not only the common Creator of all Men, of what Condition soever they be, but he is also the Author and Contriver of that Disparity and Inequality that there is in their Conditions; it is his Providence that makes one to be rich, and another poor; as it is said in *1 Sam. ii. 7. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.*

Besides, as all things in general that we have or hope for, either in this World, or in the other, are declared in Scripture to be the Gift of God, and the Fruit of his Bounty and Blessing; so of Riches in particular, we are told in Scripture, that they are the Blessing of his Providence, and are sometimes given by him as a small Reward in Hand (besides the greater Reward promised hereafter) to those that truly love and fear him. Thus the *Wise-Man* tells us, *Prov. x. 22. that the Blessing of the Lord maketh rich*: And in *Prov. iii. 16.* he says, that *Riches and Honour* are the Portion of such as *find Wisdom*; *i. e.* of such as are sincerely religious. And of the Man that *feareth God, and delighteth greatly in his Laws*, the *Psalmist* says, that *Wealth and Riches shall be in his House*, *Psal. cxii. 3.* Riches therefore, if they be honestly come by, being the Blessing of God, it cannot certainly be our Duty to slight and reject them, it cannot be a Sin in us to accept what God is pleased to bestow upon us as a Gift; but rather it must be our Duty, to keep, and to use, and improve to the Glory of God, that which he himself has been pleased to commit as a Talent to our Trust, and of which he will one Day exact of us an Account, what Good we have done with it; to keep it, I say, for those good Purposes for which it was given, so long as God is pleased we should keep it; that is, till he himself, by some Act of his Providence, takes it from us, or till we in Obedience to his Command are bound to part with it.

And that Riches (or Treasure upon Earth, as they are here called) when they are the Gift and Blessing of Providence, may be lawfully retained by those that do possess them, and are a Talent committed to their Trust by God, by the good Use whereof they will greatly increase their Reward in

in the other World, is clearly evident, from that Precept given by the *Apostle* to rich Men, concerning the Use and Abuse of worldly Riches, in *1 Tim. vi. 17. Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: That they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up for themselves in Store a good Foundation against the time to come, that they may hold on eternal Life.* For to what Purpose should the *Apostle* give these Directions to rich Men, how to use their Wealth, if indeed it was altogether unlawful for them to keep their Wealth, after their Conversion to the Christian Religion? These Directions therefore plainly suppose that a good Christian may be a rich Man, and that his Christianity does not oblige him to divest himself at once of all the Wealth that he is lawfully possessed of; for if it did, the *Apostle* would certainly rather have given one short Direction instead of those many; and it is no other than what, as a faithful Minister of Christ, he ought to have given; *viz.* that they that were rich should forthwith part with all their Wealth, which it was unlawful for them to keep. Nay farther,

2. It was not (as I said) the Design of our Lord in these Words, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, wholly to forbid even the least Desire or Endeavour to obtain for our selves a larger Portion of worldly Goods, than is absolutely necessary for our present Support: (and whatever is more than we have present Need to use, is *Treasure*; for that's the proper Meaning of the Greek Word, *θησαυρος*, *quod* *τιθηται εις αυρον*, that which is laid aside against to-morrow, or another Day.) I say then, that our *Saviour* in this Prohibition, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, did not mean to say, that if we have an Opportunity put into our Hands by Providence, of honestly procuring to our selves a larger Portion of worldly Goods than we have present need of, it is unlawful for us to lay hold of it, and improve it, and to lay aside what we have no Occasion to use at present, against another time, when we may want it, and when we may not perhaps have so good an Opportunity of supplying our Wants, after they shall be come upon us, as we have now of preventing them; for this is no more than common Prudence, what natural Reason teaches, and the Scripture no where condemns; nay, on the contrary, the holy Scripture it self sends those unthinking and improvident Persons who have it not, it sends them, I say, to the brute Creatures to learn this piece of Wisdom; *Prov. vi. 6, 7, 8. Go to the Ant, thou Slug-gard, consider her Ways, and be wise: Which having no Guide, Overseer, or Ruler, provideth her Meat in the Summer, and gathereth her Food in the Harvest.* Thus then may we lay up Treasures upon Earth; *i. e.* we may, if we have an Opportunity put into our Hands, lay up this Day what we may have Occasion for another Day; we may (as the *Ant*) provide in Summer against Winter, in Youth against old Age; and while we have Opportunity, against the time when this Opportunity may fail and cease. And what *Treasure*, *i. e.* what Provision we have before-hand, whether it be the Fruit of our own honest Diligence, or whether it hath fallen to us by Inheritance, or the Gift of Friends, we may lawfully keep till we have Occasion to use it, or till we have a Command from God to part with it.

But there are five Things, which this Precept or Prohibition of our Lord, *lay not up for your selves Treasure upon Earth*, was certainly meant to forbid.

1. The getting of Riches by Injustice, by Fraud, or Violence, or Oppression. Of this there can be no doubt; for the *Apostle* says expressly, that *no unrighteous Person shall enter into the Kingdom of God*, *1 Cor. vi. 9.* And again, *1 Thess. iv. 6. Let no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any*

Matter, because that the Lord is the Avenger of all such. And the same Reason, whereby this Exhortation against hoarding up Treasure is here enforced by our Saviour, taken from the uncertain Hold that we have of earthly Riches, is frequently applied particularly to those Treasures which are unjustly gotten; as in *Jer. xvii. 11. As the Partridge sitteth on Eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth Riches, and not by Right, shall leave them in the midst of his Days, and at his End shall be a Fool.* And the twentieth Chapter of the Book of *Job* is almost wholly spent upon this Subject, to shew the Uncertainty of those Riches that are ill gotten; *That which he hath laboured for, shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down; He hath swallowed down Riches, and he shall vomit them up again, God shall cast them out of his Belly; there shall none of his Meat be left; therefore let no Man look for his Goods.* And many other Passages there are in that Chapter to the same Purpose.

2. Another thing certainly meant to be here forbidden by our Saviour was the making the getting of Riches the Design and Business of our Lives; the bending of our whole Endeavour to get Wealth, as if the whole Happiness of our Life depended upon a superfluous Store of Provision for it; contrary to what we are expressly taught by our Saviour, *Luke xii. 15. where he dissuades from Covetousness by this very Argument; Take heed, says he, and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.*

But this is the least Fault of those who are thus intent upon the World, that they mistake the Means of their true Happiness; what is more considerable is, that such an earnest Desire to grow rich is a most probable Means of their eternal Ruin and Destruction; for of him that *maketh haste to be rich*, the *Wise-man* says, that *he shall not be innocent*, *Prov. xxviii. 20.* And to the same Purpose is that of *St. Paul*, *1 Tim. vi. 9. They that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition; for the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil.*

3. Another thing meant hereby to be forbidden, was so much Carefulness and Concern to get together a huge heap of earthly Treasure, as is inconsistent with a due Love of our Souls, and is an hindrance to us in making sufficient Provision for another Life: And then our Desire to grow rich is inconsistent with true Religion, not only when it puts us upon taking undue Courses to get Wealth, or when our secular Cares and Concerns take up all our time, but likewise when they take up so much of our time, that we have not enough left for the publick and private Exercises of Piety: Which is the Case of those, whom our Saviour in *Matth. xiii. 22.* likens to Ground overrun with Thorns: *He that received Seed among the Thorns*, says he, *is he that heareth the Word, and the Care of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches, choke the Word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

4. What was farther meant to be forbidden by these Words, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, is such Carefulness and Concern to heap up Riches, and to get Abundance and Superfluity, as would be allowable in order to the procuring of such things as are necessary to support Life: For, for the procuring of such things as are needful for the Body, Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, it is not only lawful, but to them who cannot otherwise obtain them, it is a Duty to sweat and toil, and take Pains, to rise early and sit up late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness: But when once the Necessities of Nature are answered, so much Care and so much Labour for Superfluities is unreasonable; *having Food and Raiment*, we ought to be *therewith content.* And if we do (as I suppose we may) even after this, continue our Endeavours to increase our Store, and to make some Provision for the future;

we ought however to do it with less Carefulness and Solicitude, with less Toil and Weariness, and to be more unconcerned and indifferent about the Success of our Endeavours. Because having already (as is now supposed) as much as is necessary, it is not a Matter of very much Concern to us, whether we have more or not: And therefore it is advised by the *Wise-Man*; the same *Wise-Man*, who frequently in other Places of the same Book of *Proverbs* exhorts to Diligence and Industry, and honest Labour; 'tis advised, I say, by him, that we should not thus labour for Riches and Abundance, tho' we may for Necessaries; *Prov. xxiii. 4. Labour not to be rich, cease from thine own Wisdom: Why wilt thou set thine Eyes upon that which is not?*

5. Lastly, another thing certainly meant to be forbidden by this Precept, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, is too much Love and Concern to keep together undiminished that Store of worldly Goods, which by the Providence of God is fallen to our Lot; for this is properly to lay up Treasure; for a Man may be covetous in getting Wealth; i. e. he may be too careful and solicitous to get more than is needful, and yet at the same time he may design to spend it all upon himself as fast as it comes in, in high living; so that at the Year's end, or perhaps at his Life's end, he may have no more Treasure than he had at first: But we may then be most properly said to lay up, or to treasure up Treasures, when we are continually adding to our Store, and cannot be persuaded to lessen or diminish it, tho' there be ever so reasonable an Occasion for our so doing.

And now having spoken sufficiently of the Prohibition, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*; I proceed in the next Place,

2. To speak somewhat of the proper Reason whereby it is here enforced, taken from the Consideration of the Uncertainty of worldly Riches, from the great Hazard that there is of their being spoiled or lost; *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth, where Moth and Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves break through and steal.*

It is noted by Dr. *Hammond*, that in this Place all those things which antiently were accounted Treasure, and were wont to be laid up as such, are reckoned up, and the common Casualties, which they are most liable to, taken notice of. For,

1. Cloaths or Garments were antiently, and (as he observes) even here among us formerly, accounted a Part of worldly Treasure, before the Vanity of changing Fashions made it otherwise; and this Part of earthly Treasure is very liable to be consumed or very much damnified by the *Moth*.

2. Grain or other Provision for Food, hath been accounted another Part of earthly Treasure, and this is liable to be consumed by *Beasts*, which is rendered in our Translation *Rust*; but the Word is of more large and general Signification, and denotes eating or consuming; and that learned Man thinks, we might better understand by it *Smut* or any Sort of Vermin or Caterpillars, whereby the Fruits of the Earth are wasted or devoured. And,

3. That which both antiently, and much more latterly, hath been used to be hoarded up as Treasure, is Money, which answers all things; or such other things, which acquire a Value by their Rarity or Scarceness, and may be contained in a small Room, as Jewels and precious Stones: But these also, though not liable to be eaten by *Moth* or Vermin, nor much damaged by *Rust* or *Canker*, yet are liable to Accidents of another Kind; for they can never be laid up so securely, but that *Thieves* may break in and steal them away from us. But I do not think, it was our *Saviour's* Design here, to note either all those things which Men use to account

Treasure,

Treasure, or all the Accidents that earthly Treasure is liable to: I suppose rather, that he mentioned those things which are most common, only for Example sake; seeing that Lands or Houses, or other real Estate, may with good Reason be accounted Treasure as well as Moveables; and there are innumerable other Accidents and Casualties, whereby our earthly Treasure, of what Sort soever it be, may be impaired or wasted, or taken from us, besides those that are here mentioned.

What our *Saviour* therefore hereby meant to declare, was the uncertain Hold that we have of any thing in this World: And this is indeed a good Reason, why we should not set our Heart or Affection upon any thing here below, or have any Confidence in, or Dependence upon any worldly Good, or make it our main Business and Design to labour to obtain it; forasmuch as after all the Care and Thought, and Pains that we can take about it, either our Endeavours may be successful, and we may miss of getting what we labour for; or if we do get it, we cannot be sure to keep it, no, not so much as one Day; but may in a Moment of Time, even when we least fear it, be disappointed in all the Expectation that we had of Happiness in any worldly Good. Which same Argument is well urged by *Solomon* to the same Purpose, in *Prov. xxiii. 5.* in these Words, *Wilt thou set thine Eyes upon that which is not? (its Being and Continuance is so very uncertain, that it may well be reckoned to have no Being at all; Wilt thou set thine Eyes upon that which is not?) for Riches certainly make themselves Wings, they fly away as an Eagle toward Heaven.*

But it is natural to Men to look forwards, and to make some Provision for the future time: And our *Saviour* did not mean, when he says, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, to dissuade us from so doing; but what he meant was to persuade us, to be more wise and provident in this respect than Men commonly are, and to look farther before us, than the Men of the World commonly do. He is not therefore against our laying up any Treasure against a time of Need; but he would have us lay up such a Treasure, as we may be sure will not fail us: And therefore he adds in the next Clause of the Text, which I come now to speak to,

II. A Command of a Duty, directly contrary to the Sin he had before forbidden; *but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven.* And the Practice of this Duty he enforces by an Argument taken from the Consideration of the Certainty and Durableness of the heavenly Riches; *where neither Moth nor Rust do corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through nor steal.*

Lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven.

And this Command may likewise be understood (as I told you the foregoing Prohibition might be) in two Senses; *i. e.* either, 1. as commanding us to set a high Value and Esteem upon heavenly Treasures: or, secondly, as commanding us to make it the chief Business and Design of our Life to obtain the same.

1. They may be understood as commanding us to set a high Value and Esteem upon heavenly Riches, to account them the best Treasure; in which Sense this Exhortation is parallel to that of the *Apostle, Colos. iii. 2.* *Set your Affection on things above, and not on things on the Earth.*

Or, 2. They may be understood as commanding a Practice suitable and correspondent to this Opinion; that is, that we should make it the chief Business and Design of our Life, to obtain this heavenly Treasure. And how we may do this, we are clearly taught in other Places of holy

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Scripture; viz. 1. in general, by the constant Tenor of a holy and virtuous Life: and, 2. more especially, by Works of Mercy and Charity.

1. In general, by the constant Tenor of a holy and virtuous Life. For to lay Treasures in Heaven is nothing else but to have a good Hope of eternal Life and Happiness; and *he that hath this Hope*; i. e. he only that can reasonably entertain this Hope, *purifieth himself even as God is pure*, as the *Apostle* says, *1 Joh. iii. 3*. To lay up Treasure in Heaven is the same thing which *St. Paul* calls, *1 Tim. vi. 12*. the *laying hold on eternal Life*; and that, as the *Apostle* teaches us in the same Place, is to be done, by *fighting the good fight of Faith*, by *following after Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Patience, and Meekness*: And therefore in another Place, viz. *2 Tim. iv. 8*. speaking of himself then ready to depart out of this World, he hath these Words; *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his Appearing*.

And thus understood, these Words of our Saviour, *lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven*, are nothing else but a general Exhortation to a godly and virtuous Life, and to the diligent Practice of all those Christian Graces, and Virtues, which at the beginning of this *Sermon on the Mount* he had annexed a Blessedness to, saying, *Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven; blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are the Meek, and so on*. But,

2. And more especially, we then lay up Treasures in Heaven, when we are free and liberal in imparting to the poor and needy the overplus of worldly Goods which is fallen to our Lot, more than we have need to use upon our selves: And thus understood, these Words of our Saviour, *lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven*, are a special and particular Exhortation to abound in Works of Mercy and Charity. And in this Sense the Words seem to have been understood by our Church, when she appointed this Text to be read, with other Portions of holy Scripture exhorting to Charity, in the Offertory at the Communion Service; and that not without good Reason, because it appears to be very probable, that our Saviour himself had this Sense chiefly in his Mind, when he uttered these Words. For in the sixth Chapter of *St. Luke*, where the *Evangelist* records several Passages of this Sermon of our Lord upon the Mount, and amongst others this; he expresses it in these Words, *Sell that ye have, and give Alms; provide your selves Bags which wax not old, a Treasure in the Heavens that faileth not, where no Thief approacheth, neither Moth corrupteth; for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also*. And so again in *Matth. xix. 21*. our Lord himself prescribes this same Method of obtaining Treasures in Heaven, to the Man that came to him on Purpose to be informed by him what he was to do that he might have eternal Life; *If thou wilt be perfect, says our Lord, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the Poor, and thou shalt have Treasure in Heaven*. And this same means of obtaining heavenly Riches is prescribed by *St. Paul* to those that are rich in this World, in the Place before cited, *1 Tim. vi. 18, 19*. *Charge them that are rich in this World—that they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good Foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life*.

Thus you see what it is to lay up Treasures in Heaven, and how this is to be done, viz. by the constant Tenor of a holy and virtuous Life, and especially by Works of Mercy and Charity. For, as the *Wise-Man* says in *Prov. xix. 17.* *He that hath pity on the Poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, he will pay him again.*

And to enforce this Exhortation, our *Saviour* adds a proper Reason, taken from the Consideration of the Certainty and Durableness of the heavenly Treasure that we lay up for our selves by Works of Piety and Charity: *lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven, where neither Moth nor Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through nor steal.*

The Sense of which, taken out of the Metaphor, and expressed in plain Words, is this; that the Happiness of the other World, of which, by a patient Continuance in well-doing, we shall be made Partakers, is such as will fully answer, and much more than answer our greatest Expectations; that we can meet with no Disappointment either in the Acquisition, or in the Possession and Enjoyment thereof; *the Inheritance which is reserved in Heaven for us*, being, as *St. Peter* says, *incorruptible and undefiled, and such as fadeth not away.*

But there is, as I observed, in the third Place,

III. Another Argument or Motive urged here by our *Saviour*, in the twenty first Verse, respecting both Parts of the foregoing Exhortation, and whereby both the Prohibition of laying up Treasures upon Earth, and the Command to lay up Treasures in Heaven, are alike enforced; *for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also.*

The Meaning is, that what we esteem and value most, that we shall desire most; and what we desire most, that we shall chiefly bend our Endeavours to obtain; so that consequently, if we set our Affection upon any thing here below, our Endeavour to procure the same if we have it not, or to keep and preserve it if we have it, will so consume all our Time and Labour, that we shall not be able to use such Diligence in working out our Salvation, as is necessary for that purpose. And on the contrary, that if our Treasure be in Heaven; *i. e.* if we prefer the Happiness of Heaven, before any earthly Satisfaction or Enjoyment, our Thoughts and Endeavours will be so bent and fixed upon that, that we shall have little Concern upon us, what our State and Condition in this World is.

But this Argument being (as I suppose) the same in Sense, with that which is urged to this same Purpose, at the twenty fourth Verse of this Chapter; I shall say no more of it at present; but conclude all with a good Collect of our Church, suitable to the Subject I have been discoursing of.

Or, Coll. for 4th
Sunday after
Trinity, or for
4th Sunday after
Epiphany.

Collect for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

O God, who declarest thy Almighty Power, most chiefly in shewing Mercy and Pity, mercifully grant unto us such a Measure of thy Grace, that we running the Way of thy Commandments, may obtain thy gracious Promises, and be made Partakers of thy heavenly Treasure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *

DISCOURSE LIX.

The Light of the Body spiritually applied.

MATTH. VI. 22, 23.

The Light of the Body is the Eye; if therefore thine Eye be single, thy whole Body shall be full of Light.

But if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body shall be full of Darkness: If therefore the Light that is in thee be Darkness, how great is that Darkness?



THESE Words contain a Similitude between *Light* and the *Eye*, or rather a double Similitude, one between *Light* and the *Eye*, and the other between the *Eye of the Body*, and somewhat else which is of such Use and Benefit to us in our spiritual Life, as the *Eye of the Body* is to us in our natural Life: And of these Similitudes, one is expressed, the other implied.

The Similitude expressed, is that which is between the *Light* of a Lamp or Candle, and the bodily *Eye*; *the Light of the Body is the Eye*, or rather, *the Eye is the Light of the Body*; i.e. as a Lamp or Candle burning in a Room makes a clear Discovery of all things that are within the Room, and is a Direction to Men what to do, and how to go about the Business that they have to do; about which, if there were no Light in the Room, they would be apt to commit many Mistakes and Blunders; the same good Office does the *Eye of the Body* perform to the rest of the Body; it is a Direction to the other Parts and Members of the Body, in their several Actions and Operations; and without the Benefit which the *Eye* imparts, the rest of the Members of the Body, which are all Darkness in themselves, would not know how to proceed in those Actions and Operations which they are designed and fitted for; but the Feet, which are to support the Body, and move it from Place to Place, would stumble at every Block or Stone, or would mistake the Way; and the Hands, which are designed for Business and Action, would do one Thing instead of some other Thing that was intended to be done; and the Mouth, whose Office it is to take in Nutriment proper for the Body, would be to seek where to get it, or would take in, without discerning the Difference, any thing that came in its way, and perhaps Poison instead of wholesome Food; so that without the Sight of the *Eye*, the rest of the Members of the Body, tho' placed in the clearest Light, would be as hard put to it to do their several Offices, as if they were in the blackest Darkness.

Thus

Thus *the Eye is the Light of the Body*. It follows, *If therefore thine Eye be single, thy whole Body shall be full of Light; i.e.* if the Sight of the Eye be good, and it transmits true Impressions and Representations into the Brain, of all external Objects that are within View, 'tis as well for the Body, (altho' the Eye be placed only in one Part of the Body, the Head; 'tis as well, I say, for the Body) as if every Part and Member of the Body had the same Faculty of Sight which the Eye only has; for the Feet are as well directed by the Eye which is in the Head, as if they themselves had the Faculty of seeing; the Hands discern as well what they are to do, and in what manner to go about it, as if they themselves did see their own Work; and the Mouth distinguishes as well between Food, and other Things not proper for Food, as if it self had an Eye of its own to see withal; and the like may be said of all other Parts of the Body: If the Sight of the Eye be good, *the whole Body is full of Light; i.e.* every Part and Member thereof partakes of the Benefit of the Light and Knowledge which is receiv'd by the Eye only.

And the contrary happens, if the Eye be evil; for so it follows, — *But if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body shall be full of Darknes; i.e.* if the Eye be diseased, if the Sight of it be impaired or damaged, if it represents to the Mind external Objects falsely, and as having a different Bulk, or Shape, or Colour, than they really have, all the rest of the Members are in the dark, and know not in what manner to proceed; and then the Feet, the Hands, the Mouth, and the other Parts of the Body, mistake the Business they are to do, or do it after a wrong manner; and it must needs be so; because those other Parts of the Body, having not the Faculty of seeing in themselves, have no other Knowledge of the visible Properties of the Objects they are conversant or exercised about, but only what the Eye imparts.

But the Case is worse still, if the Eye, the only Member of the Body that has the Faculty of receiving the Impression of Light, be quite put out; for then 'tis as ill for the rest of the Body, as if there were no Light at all in the World: And this is what our Saviour says, in the last Clause of the Words, *If therefore the Light that is in thee be Darknes, how great is that Darknes? If the Light that is in thee be Darknes;* this manner of speaking may seem to be improper, *if the Light be Darknes;* but however, the Sense meant by it is easy enough to be apprehended; 'tis like the Expressions used elsewhere by our Saviour; *if the Salt have lost its Savour;* for that it cannot do, and yet continue to be Salt; and, *the Children of the Kingdom shall be cast into outer Darknes;* for they that are cast into outer Darknes, are not certainly the Children, *i.e.* the Heirs or Inheritors of the Kingdom. But that which was once Salt, may lose its Savour, and so cease to be Salt: And they that were once called to inherit the Kingdom, as the Jews were, may, for their Misbehaviour, be disinherited, and so not be any longer Children of the Kingdom. And so 'tis here; the Light, while it is Light, cannot be Darknes; for no two things are more contrary than Light and Darknes: But where Light has been, Darknes may succeed; or where it should be light, it may be dark: or the Eye, which was made to receive Light; and to communicate the Benefit thereof to the rest of the Body, may by some Disease or Accident be deprived of its Light: And this is what our Saviour means by this Expression, *if the Light that is in thee be Darknes; i.e.* if what should, and what only could give Light to the Body, loses this Power or Faculty, *how great is that Darknes? i.e.* there is no Remedy then, but that the Feet must stumble, or go out of their Way, and the Hands mistake their Work, and the other Parts of the Body be render'd, in great Measure, useless and unserviceable, because there are none of them that can make Supply of the Want of that Light which the Eye has lost.

Matth. v. 12.

viii. 12.

And

And thus the Words of the Text, considered only as making a Comparison between Light and the Eye, are plain and easy enough to be understood; the Similitude between Light, and the Eye, being in several respects very obvious to be observed.

But the Words thus understood, or thus considered, do only teach a natural Truth, or a Truth in natural Philosophy; they teach us only the great Worth, and Value, and Usefulness of that part of the Body which is called the Eye: And the only Point of Practice that we are instructed in from hence, is to take all the prudent Care we can to preserve the Sight of the Eye, which is of such very great Use to us in our whole Life, and the Loss of which can be no ways possibly repaired, there being no other Part or Member of the Body capable of performing the same Office to the Body, that the Eye does.

But it is not likely that our Saviour, who came down from Heaven only to shew us the Way thither, and to instruct us in spiritual Wisdom, should spend any part of his Discourses in teaching Men any Point of natural Prudence, which might as well be learnt by natural Reason, or by the Instruction of other Masters in natural Philosophy: Our Saviour indeed was a Physician; Matth. ix. 12. Mar. ii. 17. Luk. iv. 23. — v. 31. he is sometimes called so in the New Testament; but he was not a Physician of the Body, but of the Soul; and the Cures which he sometimes wrought on the Bodies of such as were diseased, were not done by the Prescription of Medicines, but in a miraculous Manner, by the Word of his Mouth: And the Design of his doing them, was only, by the Evidence that they gave to the World of his being assisted by a divine Power, to gain Credit to his spiritual Instructions.

It is certain, therefore, that our Saviour, in these Words of the Text, meant to teach his Disciples more than is expressed in the Words themselves, *viz.* some Point of spiritual Wisdom, which is of such Use and Consequence to us in our spiritual Course of Life, as the Preservation of the Sight of the Eyes is in our natural Life.

And therefore I said at first, that in these Words, besides the Similitude that is herein expressed, between Light and the Eye, *the Eye is the Light of the Body*; there is some other Similitude implied, between the natural Eye of the Body, and something else which is of such Use to us in our spiritual Walking or Actions, as the Eye of the Body is to the Body, to direct its Goings and Operations.

And thus far I think all Commentators upon the Place are agreed; that the Words of the Text, though they express a true Proposition in themselves, were yet meant to signify more than is expressed; that our Saviour meant his Hearers should some way or other apply this natural Truth, concerning the Usefulness and Benefit of the Eye, to their spiritual Concerns, though he did not make the Application himself, or if he did, the Evangelist has not recorded it. But then, when they come to explain what our Saviour meant by the Eye, and to shew in what manner this natural Truth is to be applied to our spiritual Life, or what it is which in our spiritual Life and Conversation is of the like Benefit and Advantage, and performs the same Office to us, that the Eye of the Body does to the rest of the Body, here there is great Disagreement. For,

1. Some following herein the Opinion of St. *Augustin*, a great and learned Father of the Church, out of whose Writings several Passages are cited to this Purpose, suppose that by the *Eye*, our Saviour meant the Intention or End of our Actions; that by the *single Eye*, he meant a right Intention; by the *evil Eye*, a bad or wicked Intention; by the *whole Body's being full of Light*, in case the *Eye be single*, the Worthiness and Acceptableness of our Services, if they be performed with a right Intention; and by the *whole Body's being full of Darkness*, in case the *Eye be diseased*, or the Sight of it lost, the Un-

worthiness and Unacceptableness even of the best Actions, if they be done with a worldly, and much more if they be done with a wicked Intention.

And the Words taken in this Sense, or thus applied, contain indeed a great Truth, and imply a very useful Exhortation to us, namely this, To take care that our Aim and Intention in all our Actions be honest and religious.

For so indeed it is, that a good Intention sets a Worth and Value even upon the easiest and cheapest Actions; for as our Saviour says, *Who so gives, tho' it be but a Cup of cold Water only, to a Disciple of Christ, as such, and because he belongs to Christ, shall not lose his Reward.*

And on the other side, a wicked and corrupt Intention is sufficient to spoil even the best Actions: The most noble and heroick Acts of Virtue or Piety shall lose all their Worth, and are unfit to be rewarded by God, if they be done for any base or sinister End; and this is what our Saviour had taught before, at the beginning of this Chapter, in the Case of Alms, and Prayer, and Fasting, which though in themselves most excellent Expressions of Virtue and Religion, become nothing worth when they are done with a vain-glorious Design, in order to get worldly Praise and Reputation to our selves thereby.

And therefore, if these Words of the Text had been subjoined immediately to those Cautions before given by our Saviour, against seeking Honour to our selves from Men by our good Actions, I think there would have been little Reason to doubt, but that he had hereby meant farther to recommend to us Purity and Sincerity of Intention in all our Actions.

But it is to be considered, that in the three Verses before the Text, our Saviour had begun a Discourse upon a Subject clearly different from that; viz. about Covetousness and Worldly-mindedness; *Lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth, but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven*; and that he continues his Discourse upon the same Subject, in the Words following the Text, and to the end of the Chapter: So that these two Verses of the Text, if they be understood to be meant concerning a right and a wrong Intention, are a manifest Digression from the Matter in hand, and have no manner of Connexion with the Words either foregoing or following: And for this Reason I do not think they were meant so by our Saviour in this Place.

2. There are some, that by the *Eye*, which is the *Light of the Body*, suppose that our Saviour meant the Appetites, Desires, and Affections of the Mind; so that by the *single Eye*, he meant, such Appetites, Desires, and Affections, as are reasonable and regular; and by the *evil Eye*, such as are inordinate and vicious; because that such as are our Desires and Affections, such, for the most part, will our Actions be; if our Desires and Affections are placed upon heavenly Objects, *the Treasures in Heaven*, spoken of at the twentieth Verse, all the Actions of our Life will be ordered to that End, we shall make it our chief Business to obtain those Treasures; and on the other side, if our Affections are placed upon earthly Things, the Bent of our Endeavour will be to obtain them, and our inordinate Love and Affection to them will so blind our Eyes, that we shall not be able to discern wherein our true Happiness consists, and the Means to obtain the same.

And this likewise is certainly true, viz. that the Passions and Affections of the Mind have indeed a very great Influence upon the Actions; that if they be rightly placed, the Life and Conversation will be rightly ordered; and that if they are misplaced, the Life and Conversation will be vicious and irregular; so that this Application of the Similitude here used by our Saviour, *the Light of the Body is the Eye*, seems to be somewhat more pertinent and agreeable to the Subject treated of in the foregoing and following Verses, than the former was: But then I think there is but little Agreeableness in the Similitude

tude it self, I mean, that there is no Reason why the Passions and Affections should be likened to the Eye; for the Eye is that which enlightens the Body, which gives it Knowledge of Things without it, and at a distance from it; and 'tis with respect only to this seeing Faculty of the Eye, that our Saviour here speaks of the Eye, *the Eye is the Light of the Body*: But now what Likeness is there in this respect between the Eye, and the Passions and Affections of the Mind? For the Eye is Light, and gives Light, but the Passions and Affections are altogether blind and dark, they neither have Knowledge themselves, nor do they impart any Knowledge to the Mind; they rather help to blind and darken the Mind, than to enlighten it; so that why these should be thought to be meant here by our Saviour, when he speaks of the Eye, which is *the Light of the Body*, I can see no good Reason.

3. Therefore others there are, who by the Eye, *which is the Light of the Body*, suppose that our Saviour meant the whole Inner-Man, the Will, the In-
Munster. Pri-
caus.
tention, and all the inward Actions of the Soul.

And the Similitude thus understood and applied, contains likewise a true and an useful Proposition; viz. that such as the Mind is, such will the outward Life and Conversation be; that these, as Streams, will be of the same Nature with that Fountain from which they proceed; that these, as Fruits, will be good or bad, according as the Stock or Tree is, upon which they grow; and consequently, that it ought to be our first and chiefest Care, to cleanse and purify the Heart, according to the Direction given us by the Wise Man, *Prov. iv. 24. Keep thy Heart with all Diligence, for out of it are the Issues of Life.*

Nevertheless, I do not think that this is the right Interpretation and Application of the Similitude; partly, because the Words taken in this Sense treat of a Subject clearly different from what had been treated of in the Words before the Texts, and is continued to be discoursed of in the following Words; and partly, because if the Words be taken in this Sense, there seems to be little Likeness and Correspondence between the Similitude, and the Thing supposed to be signified and meant by it.

For *the Eye is the Light of the Body*, it serves to direct all the other Parts of the Body, in their several Actions and Operations; but the inward Actions of the Mind, i. e. the Thoughts, do not in such manner give Light and Direction to the outward Conversation; they guide indeed and govern the outward Man, for what the Will chuses, the Body does, because the Body moves by the Influence and Direction of the Will; but the Will it self has need of some such Faculty in the Soul, as the Eye is in the Body, to teach it what to chuse, or else that will be as much at a loss, as much in the dark what to chuse, as the other Members of the Body would be what to do without the Light which they receive by the Eye.

4. There is another Interpretation of these Words, or Application of this Similitude, given by Dr. Hammond, and I think by none before him, who
Ham. Catech.
l. 3. §. 5. pag.
114.
supposes, that by the *single Eye*, we are to understand Bountifulness or Liberality; and by the *evil Eye*, Enviousness or Covetousness.

And to make out this, he produces several Instances in the New Testament, Lightfoot Har.
Hebr.
wherein *ἀπλῆς*, the Word here used, and translated single, signifies bountiful, or liberal; and its Derivatives, *ἀπλῶς*, liberally, and *ἀπλότης*, Liberality; and wherein, on the other side, *ἐφθάλμιος πόνος*, the *evil Eye*, signifies Envy, Covetousness, Unsatisfiedness, Niggardliness, and all the Contraries of Liberality: And he says that the Words thus understood, do plainly enough belong to the Business in hand, viz. the *laying up Treasures upon Earth*, which had been before forbidden, and the *laying up Treasures in Heaven*, which had been before commanded; and the Inconsistence that there is between the Service of God; and the Service of *Mammon*, which is the Subject of the following Verse.

Page 115.

Verse. Because [Liberality or Charity in the Heart is a special Part of Christianity, hath a notable Influence towards the Production of all Christian Virtues, and a main Argument and Evidence it is of a Christian to have this Grace in him; and on the contrary, Uncharitableness, Worldly-mindedness, Unsatisfiedness, Uncontentedness, Envy, Covetousness, is a Sin of very ill Effect and Consequence, betrays a Man to all most unchristian Sins, fills him full of all Iniquity, (according to that of St. Paul, 1 Tim. vi. 10. *For the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil, &c.*) and is a sad Symptom, wherever we find it, of a great deal of Ill besides.]

But this Interpretation of the Words, or Application of the Similitude here used by our Saviour, seems to me no less liable to Exception, than any of the former; chiefly upon this Account, because though it be true that Liberality on the one side, or Covetousness on the other side, have indeed a very great Influence on the Practice in all other Points, yet this seems to me no sufficient Reason why they should be compared or likened to the Eye, especially as to that Faculty or Use of the Eye which our Saviour here refers chiefly to; viz. its giving Light to the Body. For that which our Saviour meant should be understood by this Similitude, is somewhat which is of such Use to us in our moral Course of Life, as the Eye is in our natural Life, somewhat which so enlightens the Mind and Soul of a Man, as the bodily Eye does the Body; and I do not see how Liberality does this, more than any other Virtue or Grace whatever.

And besides, Liberality was not the only Virtue spoken of in the foregoing Verse, neither is that the Duty particularly meant in the following Verse; for we lay up Treasures in Heaven by all other good Works, as well as by Works of Bounty and Liberality: And that Service of God, with which the Service of *Mammon* is inconsistent, consists not only in Charity and Bounty, but in an universal Obedience to all the Laws of God.

I add therefore, in the fifth and last Place,

Grot. in loc.
Erasmi. Paraph.
Perkins.

5. Another Interpretation of these Words, or another Application of this Similitude, *The Light of the Body is the Eye*, which is given by some, and which seems to me both to correspond better with the Similitude, and also to be more agreeable to the Context than any of the former.

And that is this, That by the Eye here, or rather, by that which is of the like Use to the Soul, that the Eye is to the Body, and which gives such Light to our moral Life, as the Eye of the Body does to the natural Life; (that by this Eye, I say,) is meant, the Understanding or the Judgment; which does indeed perform to the Soul the same Office that the Eye does to the Body, for it enlightens the Soul, and shews it what it is to do, and what it is to avoid; what it ought to chuse as good, and what it ought to avoid as evil: And from this manifest Similitude that there is between the Eye of the Body, with respect to the Light and Knowledge which it imparts to the Body, and the Judgment and Understanding, which serves in like manner to direct the Soul in its moral Life; that Faculty of the Soul whereby we do apprehend and judge of Things, is not only in common Discourse, but in the Holy Scripture it self sometimes called the Eye of the Mind, or the Eye of the Understanding, particularly in Eph. i. 18. *The Eyes of your Understanding being enlightened.* I say then, in the first Place, that

1. Taking the Words in this Sense, supposing that by the Eye here, our Saviour meant the Eye of the Understanding, the whole Similitude, as 'tis expressed in the Text, does correspond and agree very well with the Thing supposed to be signified and meant by it. As thus,

The Light of the Body is the Eye; so the Light of the Soul, or that which serves to direct a Man in his moral Course of Life, is the Eye of the Understanding, that Notion and Apprehension that he has of Things, that Judgment which

which he forms of them in his Mind. By this a Man discerns what he is to seek, and what he is to decline, and what are the proper Means in order to attain his End.

It follows: *If therefore thine Eye be single, thy whole Body shall be full of Light.* If thine Eye be single; i.e. If the Eye of thy Understanding be clear and open, if it be not darkned by carnal and worldly Affections, but thou seest Things as indeed they are, and judgest them to be such, neither better nor worse than they are in Truth; if thou hast a true Notion and Apprehension of Things, and makest a right Judgment concerning them, then *thy whole Body shall be full of Light*, i.e. thy Mind being thus enlightened with a true Knowledge of Things, and thou having in thy Judgment a right Valuation of them, thy Affections, and Desires, and Endeavours, will be correspondent to thy Judgment; and then thou wilt love Things as they deserve to be loved, and desire them in such measure as they are desirable, and bestow, in order to the obtaining them, such Pains and Labour as is proportionable to the Benefit thou wilt receive from the Possession thereof: Thus thy moral Course of Life will be enlightened and directed by a right understanding of Things.

It follows farther; *But if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body shall be full of Darknes*: If thine Eye be evil; i.e. If the Eye of thy Understanding be obscured, so that thou hast a false Notion and Apprehension of Things, and passest a wrong Judgment concerning them; esteeming that to be Good which is Evil, and that Evil which is Good; then *thy whole Body shall be full of Darknes*; i.e. the whole Course of thy Life and Conversation will be wicked and corrupt; thy Affections will be misplaced, thou wilt love that which thou oughtest to hate, and hate that which thou oughtest to love; and thy Endeavours will be bent to a wrong End, thou wilt seek that which will prove to thy Hurt, and neglect that wherein thy true Happiness does consist.

It follows in the last Place, *If therefore the Light that is in thee be Darknes, how great is that Darknes?* i.e. says *Erasmus*, in his Paraphrase upon the Place; If thy Reason be blinded by Lust, so that it judges that to be happy which indeed is miserable, and judges that to be chiefly and above all Things to be desired, which in Truth ought to be despised and neglected; into what a Mist of Darknes will the whole Man be led, by Ambition, and Lust, and Covetousness, and Foolishness, and Anger, and Envy, and Hatred, and other Passions and Disorders of the Mind, which in themselves are all dark and blind? If thy Reason and Judgment which was given thee (for the same End that the Eye was to the Body) to guide thee and keep thee in the right Way; if, I say, this discerning and reasoning Faculty does mislead thee, by a false Notion and Opinion of Things, there is nothing else, no other Faculty of thy Soul, that is capable of correcting those Errors in Practice, which this false Judgment leads thee into.

Thus, I say, if by the Eye we suppose our Saviour meant that discerning and judging Faculty of the Soul, viz. the Understanding and Judgment, whereby we apprehend the Nature, and pass an Estimation upon the Value and Worth of Things, the whole Similitude agrees well with the Thing signified by it; the Judgment being in every respect the same to the Soul, that the Eye is to the Body; and a right Judgment yielding to us the same Light and Direction in our moral Course of Life, that a well-seeing Eye does in our natural Life; and a false Judgment in spiritual Matters betraying us as certainly into Mistakes and Errors in Practice, as a diseased Eye, which represents to us the Things without us, as of a different Bigness, or Shape, or Colour, than they really are, does lead us into the like Mistakes in our common Life; or as a Defect of Sight does expose us to the Danger of stumbling in our Way, or going astray from it.

And, 2. As this Application of the Similitude agrees very well with the Similitude it self, so I think it gives a Sense that is more pertinent and agreeable to the Context, than any of those before mentioned: For I have noted already (in discoursing on the three foregoing Verses), that the Prohibition in the nineteenth Verse, *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth*, is to be understood as design'd to forbid, not only the Practice of Covetousness, in scraping together, and hoarding up as much of this World as we can; but likewise, and indeed much rather, the Principle and Cause of such Covetousness, which is an Error or Mistake in the Judgment, the having too high an Esteem of, the setting too great a Value upon the corruptible and perishing Riches of this World, the thinking them, if not the only, yet, at least, the best Treasure that we can lay up for our selves.

And I have also already noted, that the contrary Command in the twentieth Verse, *but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven*, is to be understood as designed to enjoin, not only the constant and diligent Practice of all Christian Graces and Virtues (by which only it is that we can lay up Treasures in Heaven; *i. e.* can obtain a good Assurance of a blessed and glorious Immortality in the other World) but likewise, and indeed much rather, as designed to enjoin that, which naturally and of course will engage our Diligence in seeking these heavenly Treasures, *viz.* a right Value and Estimation of them in our Judgments; we are thereby commanded to prize and esteem them more than any earthly Treasure, and to think that we shall be much happier in a good Assurance of the Blessedness of Heaven, than we can be made by the greatest Affluence and Abundance of earthly Goods. And to this Sense both of the Prohibition and of the Command, I observed, that that Reason is most apposite, which is added by our Saviour, at the twenty first Verse, to enforce them both; *for where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also; i. e.* what you prize and value most in your Judgments, that you will, of course, be most diligent to procure for your selves; it will be natural for you, to desire and seek for that most, which you esteem to be the best and the truest Treasure.

And to those Words, these Words of the Text are very fitly subjoined, as expressing the same Sense, *The Light of the Body is the Eye; or, The Eye is the Light of the Body, &c. i. e.* as I have before explained the Similitude: The Judgment that you make of Things in your Minds gives Light and Direction to the Actions of your Life; so that if your Judgment be rightly informed, as to the true Value and Worth of Things, you will of Course bestow most Pains in seeking those Things which are most worth your Pains; that is, you will make it your chief Business to lay up Treasures in Heaven, that fail not: but if your Judgment be misinformed, your Desires and Affections will also be misplaced; and then you will spend your Labour in heaping up earthly Treasures, which will yield you but little Profit while you have them, and which you cannot be sure to keep long.

So that the Words thus understood have the same Sense and Meaning with the Words immediately foregoing, *where your Treasure is, there will your Heart be also; i. e.* what you esteem to be the best and truest Treasure, you will affect, and desire, and covet most, and be chiefly concerned to procure for your selves; your Affections and Endeavours will be agreeable to your Judgment.

Only, whereas the foregoing Words had expressed this Sense particularly, and with a special respect to the *laying up Treasures in Earth, or in Heaven*, these Words do express the same Sense more generally, and in such manner as that it may be applied to all other Cases; it is declared in these Words, that our Practice in all Points will be correspondent to our Opinion; that our Life and Conversation will be in every respect good or bad, according as we pass a true or a false Judgment on Things.

So that the Lesson, or good Instruction designed to be taught us by our Saviour, in these Words, I suppose is this, to take the best Care we can, to have our Judgment rightly informed concerning the Worth, and Value, and Use of those Things on which we set our Affections, or about which we bestow our Pains; that so we may not affect, or desire, or labour for any thing more than it deserves, nor disesteem and neglect those Things wherein our true Happiness consists, or upon which it depends.

And this Lesson, or good Instruction, our Saviour himself gives (in the same metaphorical Expression which he uses here) in *Luke xi. 35. Take heed therefore, that the Light which is in thee be not Darkness; i. e.* take heed that the Eye of thy Understanding discern well the Nature of those Things, in the obtaining or avoiding of which thou art to exercise thy self in thy moral Course of Life.

And if now it be enquired, what Care we are to take about this? or how we may be best enabled to judge rightly of Good and Evil, with the spiritual Eye of the Understanding? it will be easy to give the Directions proper for this Purpose, by only observing what Course we take to have a true Notion of those Things which we look upon with our bodily Eye. For,

1. That we may not be deceived and imposed upon in the Objects of our Sight, we take Care to keep the Sight of our Eye clean, and free from all Mores, Dust, Diseases, and other Impediments of Sight.

And the same Course we must take to prevent being deceived in spiritual Things; we must take Care that the Eye of our Judgment or Understanding be not darkened by Lust, or Passion, or Sensuality, which do as naturally hinder us from discerning between Good and Evil, as Dust, or Film, or some other Fault in the natural Eye of the Body, hinders that from a right Apprehension of the Object that is placed before it. And to this Purpose we are exhorted by the Apostle, *not to walk as the Gentiles walked, in the Vanity of their Mind, Eph. iv. 17.* And of them that so walked, he says in the next Verse that they had *their Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that was in them, because of the Blindness of their Heart; so that being past feeling, they gave themselves over unto Lasciviousness, to work all Uncleanness with Greediness.*

2. That we may discern well with our bodily Eye the Objects that are before us, it is necessary, not only that the Eye be good, but that the Object also be placed in a true Light.

And so it is here; the Judgment, which is the Eye of the Soul, be it ever so clear in it self, can no more apprehend rightly, and form a true Notion of spiritual Things, without a good Light, than the Eye of the Body can discern Things that are placed in Darkness, or in a false Light.

And therefore, in order to the forming a right Judgment of Things, it is necessary, that the Eye of the Understanding be it self enlightned by some other Light, thro' which, as thro' a proper Medium, it may behold the Objects which it is to pass Judgment upon.

And there are two sorts of Light, by the Help of which the Eye of the Understanding may form a right Notion of spiritual Things; which are both of them true Lights, but only one is more dim and obscure, like the Light of a Candle; the other more bright and shining, like the Light of the Sun; the first is the Light of Reason, the other is the Light of Scripture.

1. The Light of natural Reason, though, in Comparison with the other it be small and dim, like the Light of a Candle, is yet a true Light, and of great Use to enable us to form a right Notion of Things, and to discern between Good and Evil. And by this Light only, a great many of the wiser among the *Heathens*, did clearly discern, that the Happiness of Man did not consist in worldly Riches and Honours, or in bodily Delights and Satisfaction,

but

but in Peace of Mind and Conscience, and in the spiritual Pleasures that attended a virtuous Course of Life. But by this Light only, though they saw clearly what they did see, they could not see very far before them; they could not discern fully those good Things, such as *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart of Man to conceive, which God hath laid up in the other World, for them that love him*; and therefore 'tis no Wonder, that by that imperfect Notion which they had of true Happiness by this Light only, they were not perfectly instructed in the Way to Happiness, nor sufficiently encouraged to keep on steadily in a Course of Virtue.

But *God hath revealed these Things to us by his Spirit*:

This therefore is that other Light before spoken of, which is more bright and shining, like the Light of the Sun, which discovers Things afar off as well as near hand; I mean, the Light of Revelation, or of the holy Scripture; by the Help of which, if the Eye of the Judgment and Understanding be open and clear, we may make such a true and certain Judgment of Good and Evil, of what is desirable, and what is not, as is abundantly sufficient to direct us in our spiritual Course of Life: For by this, and especially by the Light of the holy Gospel, which from Christ the *Sun of Righteousness* is dispersed throughout the World, and hath *shined* into our *Hearts*; by this Light, I say, we may clearly see, that there is no solid or satisfying Happiness to be had in earthly Riches, or in any worldly Enjoyments; that the only Happiness adequate to the Desires of a rational Soul, is to be had in the Possession of the heavenly Riches, and in the Enjoyment of God, the Fountain of all Good. And being persuaded of this, it will be easy and natural for us to despise these lower Pleasures of Sense, and to aspire after, and to bend our whole Endeavour towards the obtaining of the *Inheritance* that is *reserved in Heaven* for us, which is *incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away*.

Psal. xix. 8.

— cxix. 105, 106.

Prov. vi. 23.

2 Tim. i. 10.

And because the divine Revelation makes such a clear Discovery of these Things to us, yielding that Help and Benefit to the spiritual Eye of the Understanding, which the Light of the Sun does to the natural Eye of the Body, it is therefore often in Scripture stiled *Light*. Thus, *The Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightning the Eyes*, says the Psalmist. And again, *Thy Word is a Lamp unto my Feet, and a Light unto my Path: through thy Precepts I get Understanding, therefore I hate every false Way*. And, *The Commandment is a Lamp, and the Law is Light*, says the Wise-Man. And of the Holy Gospel in particular, the Apostle says, that *Life and Immortality were brought to Light by it*. And our Saviour says of himself, *John xii. 46. I am come a Light into the World, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in Darkness*.

That therefore we may have a right Notion and Apprehension of spiritual Things, that we may clearly discern between Good and Evil, it is necessary that we behold them in that Light which the Scripture affords to us; and in order to this, it is necessary, that we be diligent in the reading and study of the holy Scripture; and that we readily receive and embrace those Notions of Things which are taught us therein. But,

3. Even the best disposed Eye cannot judge rightly of those Objects which are placed before it in the clearest Light, especially if they be at a great Distance, in case it looks upon them only with a transient Glance, unless it looks upon them attently, unless the Sight be fixed for some Time upon them.

And so it is in our spiritual Sight; be the Eye of the Judgment ever so clear and good, and the Objects thereof ever so clearly represented to us by the Light of Reason and Scripture, we shall yet be in great Danger of mistaking them, and of passing a wrong Judgment concerning them, unless we view them narrowly and attently, and fix our Mind upon them by serious Meditation.

It is not enough therefore for the Direction of our Practice, it is not sufficient to take off and disengage our Affections from the good Things of this World, only to learn from Reason or Scripture, that all the good Things of this Life are transient and perishing, and unsatisfactory; nor, on the other side, is it sufficient to make us fix our Affections and Desires upon heavenly Objects, only to be told, as we are in Scripture, that *the Things which are not seen are eternal*; that *in the Presence of God there is fulness of Joy, and that at his Right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore*: But it is moreover necessary, that we consider these Things attently and seriously, that we weigh and ponder them well in our Minds, that we take some Time to exercise our Meditations thereupon, that we wisely compare together the good and evil Things of this World, with the good and evil Things of the other World, and seriously consider the infinite Difference that there is between a Moment and Eternity. But,

4. Lastly, As every good and perfect Gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, so of this spiritual Wisdom in particular, we are told in Scripture, that it is *the Gift of God*; and therefore it is directed by St. James, chap. i. ver. 5. *that if any Man lacks Wisdom, he should ask it of God.*

It is necessary, therefore, that to our own Endeavours to obtain a right Judgment in spiritual Things, by the Eye of our own Understanding, enlightened by Reason and Scripture, and looking narrowly and attently upon those Things concerning which we are to form a Judgment: It is necessary, I say, that to these Endeavours of our own we also add our hearty Prayers to God for the Light of his holy Spirit to instruct us, and for the Assistance of his Grace to direct and guide us in the Choice and Pursuit of our true Happiness; praying for our selves, in such manner as St. Paul does for the Ephesians, Eph. i. 17, 18. *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, would give unto us the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the Knowledge of him: That the Eyes of our Understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what are the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the Saints.* Or else we may put up the same Petition, in the Prayer that is sometimes taught us by our own Church, and with which I shall conclude:

Collect for *Whitsunday.*

O God, who didst teach the Hearts of thy faithful People, by sending to them the Light of thy holy Spirit; grant us, by the same Spirit, to have a right Judgment in all Things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy Comfort, through the Merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the Unity of the same Spirit, One God, World without End. Amen.



DISCOURSE LX.

The Service of God and Mammon compared.

(*****)

MATTH. VI. 24.

No Man can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.



OUR *Saviour* still continues his Discourse upon the same Subject which he had entred upon at the ninth Verse of this Chapter, *viz.* Covetousness and Worldly-mindedness, or the setting a very high Value and Esteem upon earthly Riches.

And by the Connexion of these Words with the foregoing, it seems as if they were designed by our *Saviour* for an Answer to an Objection, which some might be ready to make, against those Precepts which he had given at the nineteenth and twentieth Verses; *lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth,— but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven.* For what need, might they say, is there of our neglecting the Pursuit of earthly Riches, in order to our obtaining Treasures in Heaven? For admit, might they say, that those are not so much worth as these, yet why may we not seek those and these too? Why may we not divide our Thoughts and our Time between them; so treasuring up earthly Riches, as at the same time not to neglect the laying up Treasures in Heaven too?

And this is what all covetous and worldly-minded Men are apt to plead in their own Justification or Excuse; *viz.* that though they do indeed love the World very well, yet they hope they love God too at the same time; that though they are indeed very industrious in heaping up worldly Riches, yet they do not therefore quit or abandon God's Service; that they do not mean by setting their Affections on things upon Earth, to take them wholly off from the things of Heaven; but that what they mean is, at the same time, to get as large a Portion for themselves as they can of the good things both of this World and also of the next.

This Plea therefore, or Objection, our *Saviour* answers in these Words, by declaring, that the thing which they propose to do is impracticable; by shewing that those two Ends or Designs, which they say they do prosecute both at

the same time, are inconsistent, so that they cannot carry on, to good Purpose, both of them at once. And this he does by citing a common proverbial Expression, and applying it to the Matter in Hand. *No Man*, says he, *can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other*: This general proverbial Truth, our Saviour here takes for granted, as being evident in it self, and needing no Proof; and then he applies it to the Matter in Hand in the following Words, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*.

In discoursing on which Words, I shall,

I. Consider the general proverbial Speech or Expression, *No Man can serve two Masters*; and shew in what Sense it is to be understood. And,

II. I shall consider the Doctrine or Conclusion which our Saviour here lays down, (drawing it from the Application of that general proverbial Speech to the particular Matter which he had been before discoursing of,) *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*.

I. I shall consider the general proverbial Speech or Expression, *No Man can serve two Masters*; and shew in what Sense this Saying is to be understood.

And 'tis Ground and Reason enough for any Saying to be received and to pass current as a Proverb, if it be true for the most Part; if there are very few Exceptions to it; if there are very few Instances in which it fails.

And so it is here; this Sentence, *No Man can serve two Masters*, has a proverbial Truth in it; and yet some few Exceptions may be made thereto. Particularly,

1. There is no Inconsistence in serving two Masters that are subordinate the one to the other. For thus a Servant, who, out of Conscience towards God, is diligent and faithful in that worldly Business which his earthly Master sets him to, is thereby a good Servant to his earthly Master, and yet at the same time, and even by the very same Actions, performs acceptable Service to his heavenly Master too, who has commanded *Servants to be obedient in all Things to their Masters*. And therefore the Apostle in *Eph. vi. 5*. pressing the Duties of Servants to their Masters, does it by this Argument, that in yielding due Obedience to their earthly Masters, they do also perform the Will of God. *Servants, be obedient to them that are your Masters according to the Flesh, with Fear and Trembling, in Singleness of Heart, as unto Christ; not with Eye-service as Men-pleasers, but as the Servants of Christ, doing the Will of God from the Heart; with good Will doing Service, as to the Lord, and not to Men*.

2. There is no Inconsistence in serving two Masters, though suppos'd of equal Authority, in case their Wills are always exactly the same. And therefore though the sacred Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity are truly distinct; (For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost;) and though we profess to believe, that in this Trinity none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another, but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal; yet there is no Inconsistence in performing that Service to all these three Persons, which at our Baptism we undertook, when we were baptised in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: And the Reason is, because tho' they are three in Person, they are but one in Essence; and therefore, to be sure, but one in Will; (for the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one;) so that whatever Worship or Service is given or perform'd to one, is given or perform'd to them all. And therefore, because the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, our Saviour

Saviour says, *Joh. v. 23.* that *he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father.* And,

3. There is no Inconsistence in serving two Masters (though they have different or contrary Wills) successively, *i. e.* at several Times. Thus the *Apostle* writing to the *Romans*, *Rom. vi. 17.* hath these Words; *Ye were the Servants of Sin, i. e.* ye were so once: For then it follows, *But ye have obeyed from the Heart that Form of Doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from Sin, ye became the Servants of Righteousness.*

But notwithstanding these Exceptions, it may well enough be uttered and received as a general Truth, that *no Man can serve two Masters*; for so it is, if, limiting our Speech to one and the same Time, by *two Masters* we understand two distinct Persons, that do each of them claim a Right to the whole Service of their Vassal; and if by the two Masters we also understand two that are distinct, not only in Person, but in Will; so that it is not impossible that they should command their Servant different or contrary things, (for in these Cases it is impossible that a Man should be the Servant of two Masters at once; *i. e.* that he should at the same time give up himself perfectly and entirely to the Will and Pleasure of two distinct Persons that have different Wills, and so may, and 'tis probable sometimes will, command different if not contrary things,) in these Cases a Man can no more divide his Service between two such Masters, than he can multiply himself; but he must (as our Saviour here says,) *either hate the one, and love the other; or hold to the one, and despise the other.*

I proceed now in the second Place,

II. To consider the Doctrine or Conclusion which our Saviour here lays down, (drawing it from the Application of that general proverbial Speech to the Matter he had been before discoursing of,) *ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* And here,

1. I shall enquire, what is meant by *Mammon*?
2. I shall shew, what it is to be a *Servant of Mammon*?
3. I shall shew, what it is to be a *Servant of God*?
4. Lastly, I shall endeavour to make appear the Truth of the Doctrine here delivered by our Saviour, *viz.* that a Man cannot at the same time be a Servant both of God and of *Mammon*; *ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

1. I shall enquire, what is meant by *Mammon*?

And 'tis agreed, I think, by all, that the Word *Mammon* is a *Syriac* Word, signifying Riches or Treasure; and in this Sense it seems used by our Saviour, in *Luke xvi. 9.* *Make to your selves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, i. e.* of your false and deceitful Riches; make to your selves Friends of them, *i. e.* by bestowing them in Works of Mercy and Charity. And so again at the eleventh Verse of that Chapter, *If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, i. e.* if ye have not been faithful Stewards of those worldly Riches which God has committed to your Trust, *who will commit to your Trust the true Riches?* where the Opposition that is made between the true Riches, *i. e.* the Treasures in Heaven which fail not, and the *unrighteous Mammon*, or unrighteous Riches, confirms the Interpretation before given of the Word *unrighteous*, *viz.* that it signifies the same as *false, deceitful, and perishing*; such as all the Riches of this World indeed are, which are liable to be lost by a thousand Accidents, and which while enjoyed, do not satisfy the Desires, nor answer the Expectations of those that have them, or that labour for them.

But here in this Place, the Word *Mammon* is plainly used in a somewhat different Sense, *viz.* as signifying not a Thing, but a Person; *Mammon* is here plainly

plainly spoken of as a God, *i. e.* as an Idol or false God, set up in the Place of the true God, and by some Men worshiped and served as the true God only ought to be; *ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

And accordingly it is observed by some out of *Tertullian*, that the *Numen* or Deity that was accounted by the antient *Heathens* the God of Money, being, as they thought, the God in whose Power it was to bestow Riches, and which was call'd by the *Egyptians*, *Serapis*, or *Osiris*, and by the *Greeks*, *Pluto*, was by others called *Mammon*. Waserus de
Antiq. Num-
mis Hebr.

To which Notion or Opinion of the *Heathens* our *Saviour* here accommodates his Discourse; thereby to set forth after a more lively Manner the Inconsistence of covetousness with true Religion; to which purpose he represents the covetous Man (frequently elsewhere in Scripture called an *Idolater*) as a Person devoted to the Service of the Idol called *Mammon*, in whose Power, he thinks, it is to give Wealth; as on the other side, the truly religious and good Man is here represented as one that is entirely devoted to the Service of God, in whose Power it certainly is to give the true and heavenly Riches, *i. e.* eternal Life and Happiness.

So that by *Mammon* we are here to understand the *Devil*, who is sometimes in Scripture called *the God of this World*; and who said of himself, when he would have tempted our *Saviour* to worship him, and in order to that had shewed him all the Kingdoms of the World; *all this Power will I give thee, and the Glory of them, for that is delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will I give it.* Luke iv. 6.

Not that this was indeed true; not that the *Devil* has indeed such a full and absolute Power to dispose of worldly Wealth to whom he will, as he there pretended to have; for in Truth 'tis God only that gives Power to get Wealth. Deut. viii. 18; But however, this is Matter of Fact, that worldly Riches do very often, by the Disposition of God's Providence, fall to the Lot of the vilest and worst of Men, and that they are sometimes obtained by the Practice of the greatest Sins; and therefore, because in that Case they cannot be thought to be given by God, as a Blessing or Reward, to such wicked Men, they may well enough be said to be the *Devil's* Gifts; and the *Devil*, or *Mammon*, considered according to the *Heathens* Notion, as the God of worldly Wealth and Riches, may be said to be the God whom they serve, in order to obtain worldly Wealth.

This therefore was the second thing I proposed to do, *viz.*

2. To shew, what it is to be a *Servant of Mammon*. And *Mammon* being here spoken of personally, according to the Notion which the *Heathens* had of the Idol which they called by that Name, *i. e.* as the God of Wealth, as the God that had Power to give as much Wealth as he pleased to his Servants and Votaries, but who had nothing else to bestow upon them; and it being necessary, not only in order to true Religion and the Worship of God, but likewise in order to Idolatry, or the Worship of a false God, that a Man should believe that the God or Idol which he worships will be a Rewarder of those that serve and worship him: it is plain, that if the Case were really so, as it is here represented in Figure; that is, if there were indeed any God or Idol named *Mammon*, that could give what Wealth he pleased to his faithful Servants, but could give them nothing else, no Man would chuse to be a Worshiper or Servant of this God, or Idol, but he only who reckoned that Riches (the only Good this God had to give) was a greater Good than any that any other God had to bestow upon such as worshiped him: For if he thought that any other God could reward his Worshipers better than *Mammon*, he would certainly chuse to be a Servant of that God rather than of *Mammon*; there being no Man in his Wits, that, if he must be a Servant, would not chuse to be a Servant to that Master, who, he thinks, will give the most Wages, and reward in the best Manner those that do Service to him.

A Servant of *Mammon*, therefore, is one who thinks that worldly Riches (the only Reward that *Mammon* has to give his Servants) is the greatest Good that any God has to bestow upon his Worshipers: He is one that thinks Wealth the *Summum Bonum*, the greatest and highest Happiness that a Man is capable of. In consequence of which Opinion, he naturally makes the attainment of Riches his chief and ultimate End; Wealth is that to which he bends all his Study and Endeavour; that, which if he can by any Means obtain, he shall, he thinks, be as happy as God can make him; that, which if he should miss or come short of, he shall, in his own Opinion, be the most wretched and miserable among Men. And having this Notion of Riches, it is not to be supposed that he will let pass any Opportunity, or neglect any probable Means of growing rich: Having Riches in his Eye as the last and ultimate End to which he tends, he will make his best and nearest Way to it; he will account nothing good, or worth his Regard, that lies cross to his Design, and hinders him from attaining that which he thinks the chiefest Good, in Comparison with which all other Goods are to be neglected and disregarded; and he will account nothing Evil, that any ways promotes and furthers his grand Design of growing rich: So that he that is a Servant of *Mammon* readily does any thing that *Mammon* bids him do; *i. e.* any thing that he is persuaded will conduce to the increase of his Wealth: He knows no Virtue or Praise but Riches, and no sin but Poverty.

In plain Words, a Servant of *Mammon* is a covetous Man, one whose Heart and Mind is set upon Riches, one that, in the Phrase of the *Apostle*, *will be rich, i. e.* who is resolved to be rich at any Rate, and whatever it costs him, and whatever he loses or suffers in order to it; and who, if he be rich already, hugs and pleases himself in his Store, and puts an entire Trust in his Riches, *making Gold his Hope*, and *saying to the fine Gold, thou art my Confidence*, and looks down with a scornful Pity upon all those that are in a poor and low Condition, as the most despicable Creatures upon the Face of the Earth.

I proceed now in the third Place—

3. To shew, what it is to be a Servant of God. And *he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him*; as the *Apostle* says, *Heb. xi. 6.* But now the only Reward that God has promised to his faithful Worshipers is in the other World, an eternity of Life and Glory in Heaven. He gives indeed other good things, as it were by the bye, *viz.* Food and Raiment, and whatever else is needful for this Life; and sometimes also he gives Honour, Wealth and Abundance; but I say, the only proper Reward of Virtue and Godliness, the only Good that the best Men can be fully assured not to fail of, is the Happiness of the other World.

He therefore that is the Servant of God, he that chuses the Service of God rather than of *Mammon*, or of any other Master, must be one that likes this Reward or Wages, which God offers to give to his Servants, better than the best Gifts that *Mammon* can bestow. For he would not chuse God for his Master if he did not like his Pay, if he thought any other Master could give better Wages.

A Servant of God therefore is one that has his Eye always fixed upon Heaven, and has his *conversation in Heaven*; he reckons, that neither the good things of this Life, nor the Sufferings of it, are *worthy to be compared with that Glory that shall be revealed*: He esteems the Happiness of Heaven the *Summum Bonum*, the chief Felicity, the only thing worth aiming at, and striving for, and in Comparison with which all other Goods ought to be neglected and set light by. And in pursuance of this great Design, he readily and cheerfully sets himself to the discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Charity,

Charity, and Sobriety, which are required by God as the Condition of obtaining this eternal Happiness. The *Law* of God is to him (as it was to the *Psalmist*) *better than thousands of Gold and Silver*; and he *loves the Commandments of God above Gold, yea above fine Gold*: Nay he esteems (as ^{Psal. cxix. 72.} *Moses* did) even *the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures of Egypt*; having *Respect unto the Recompence of the Reward*. And lastly, whatever Accidents befall him in this Life, he endeavours the best he can to turn them to his own spiritual Advantage, and to improve them for the Increase of his future Happiness. If God gives him, (as sometimes he does to his obedient Servants) worldly Plenty and Prosperity, he receives it as the Gift of God, and is thankful to his Benefactor; but he *is not high-minded*, he *puts no Trust in these uncertain Riches*, he *makes Friends to himself in Heaven of this Mammon of unrighteousness*, and by bestowing his worldly Wealth in Works of Mercy and Charity, turns Dirt into Gold, and converts (by a Sort of spiritual Chymistry) these perishing Riches into the heavenly Treasures that will never fail him. And on the other Side, if his Circumstances in the World are mean and low, he submits chearfully to his Lot, and is content with his Condition; and in the Want of many Conveniences, or even of the Necessaries of this Life, comforts himself with an assured Hope, that having such a scanty Share of good things in this World, he has a larger Portion reserv'd for him in Heaven; and so that he may but at last attain to that Honour, and Glory, and Immortality, which he looks for there, he values not through what Difficulties and Hardships in this World he is forced to make his Way to it.

And now, having shewn in what Notion we are here to understand the Word *Mammon*, and what it is to be a *Servant of Mammon*, and what it is to be a *Servant of God*, I proceed to the fourth and last Thing propounded, which was

4. To endeavour to make appear the Truth of the Conclusion here laid down, or the Doctrine here taught by our Saviour, *viz.* that a Man cannot be a Servant of God and of *Mammon* both at the same time. *No Man can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

And the Truth of this Doctrine, that a Man cannot serve God and *Mammon*, and also how rightly this Conclusion is drawn from the *Premises*, *viz.* from that general proverbial Speech at the Beginning of the Verse, *No Man can serve two Masters*, in the Sense wherein (as I have already intimated) it ought to be understood, will, I suppose clearly appear, if these two things be considered. (1.) That God and *Mammon*, the two Masters here spoken of, do both of them require that their Servants should be wholly addicted and devoted to them only. And, (2.) That they are two such Masters, whose Wills are not only distinct and different, but in many Instances directly contrary to each other.

(1.) I say, that God and *Mammon*, the two Masters here spoken of, do both of them require that their Servants should be wholly addicted and devoted to them only; God requires the whole Man, and so does *Mammon*; and therefore no Man can be a Servant to both of them, unless he could multiply himself and become two Men.

1. I say, God requires the whole Man. He that is the Servant of God, must *love the Lord his God with all his Heart, and with all his Soul, and with all his Mind, and with all his Strength*; and whoso thus loves God can have no Place in his Heart for any thing else. The Servant of God must *glorify God in his Body and in his Spirit*, and with all the Powers and Faculties of both; and whoso is thus entirely addicted to God's Service, will have no Power or Faculty left free for any other Service. And,

2. *Mammon* likewise requires of his Servants, that they be wholly and entirely

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ly at his Devotion. For there are not more, nay, I believe I may say, there are not ordinarily such great Difficulties, and so many Impediments, in the Way of Virtue and Religion, as there are in the Way of worldly Riches: So that he that is resolved to be rich, must apply himself wholly to this one Business, or else it is great odds but he will fail of his Design; he must have his Mind constantly intent upon this End, and his Wits continually working to bring it about, and his Hands always ready to execute the Means whereby it may be compassed.

In a Word, the labour of Religion, and the labour of growing rich, are either of them alone a sufficient Employment for a Man; they are either of them alone enough to take up all his Thoughts, and Care, and Time: So that he who thinks to divide himself between these two things, will in Truth mind neither of them to any good Purpose. Having two such great and such very different Designs both carrying on at once, it is most probable he will miscarry in both of them; because whatever Care or Time is bestowed on one, must be taken from the other, and what remains will not be sufficient for that.

For the most Care that a Servant of God (who makes Heaven the End, and Religion the Business of his Life) can spare from this great Concern, will be no more than is commonly requisite for the procuring of the Necessaries or great Conveniences of Life. And the most that a Servant of *Mammon*, (who makes Riches his End, and the Cares of this World his main Employment) will be able to spare from his great Design of growing rich, will be no more than will just suffice to make such a shew of Religion, as may be of use to him to carry on his worldly Designs. But he that is only moderately careful for Necessaries (which indeed a good Man and a true Servant of God may be) will hardly ever attain to great Riches, unless it be by a wonderful Chance, or an extraordinary Providence. A moderate Care is not sufficient for this Purpose, according to the common Course of things. And on the other Side, he that has only so much Religion as is necessary to make a Shew of, (which a *Mammonist* may have) or who makes a shew of Religion only to promote and farther his secular Designs, is not a true Servant of God, nor will be ever own'd and rewarded by him in the other World as such. Our *Saviour* himself says at the first Verse of this Chapter, that *they that do their Righteousness before Men to be seen of them, have no Reward of their Father which is in Heaven*. So that for a Man to design both these Ends, and to prosecute them both with good Effect, is as impossible as it is for a Traveller to direct his Course to two Places that are far wide of each other, and to go at once in the several Ways leading to both of them. But,

(2.) The Inconsistence of Covetousness with true Religion, or the Impossibility of being a Servant of God and of *Mammon* at the same time, will farther appear, if we consider, that these are two such Masters, whose Wills are not only distinct and different, but in many Instances directly contrary to each other.

Now if their Wills were only distinct and different, if they did not always both command the same things, there would be a Necessity, at least sometimes, of disregarding the one, while we held to the other: But when their Wills are clearly contrary the one to the other, when one commands what the other forbids, the holding to one is more than a mere Slight or Disrespect, it is indeed an Act of downright Disobedience to the other: In this Case it is so far from being possible to love and serve them both, that the Love of the one necessarily implies a perfect Hatred and Aversion to the other. And that's the Case here.

For God commands us to *set our Affections on things above*; *Mammon*, to place them only upon the things below: God commands us to *seek rather the Kingdom of God*; *Mammon*, to look no farther than to the Kingdoms of this

World, and the Glory of them: God commands us to aim at the Happiness of the other World, to make that our ultimate End, and to direct all our Endeavours to obtain that; *Mammon*, on the contrary, tells us, there is no other Happiness but in Riches; that he that is great in this World, is as great as he can be, or as he can wish to be; that he that is rich is every thing that can be desired, and needs nothing else to make him completely happy. So that it is as impossible to obey both these at once, as it is to have two ultimate Ends, two principal Designs, and to tend upwards and downwards both at the same Time.

And the Means whereby God commands us to seek his Kingdom, and whereby *Mammon* commands us to get Riches, are in most Instances no less contrary, than the Ends are which they severally command us to aim at. Prov. xxviii. And therefore the *Wise-man* tells us, that *he that maketh haste to be rich* ^{20.} *shall not be innocent*: And the *Apostle*, that *the love of Money is the Root* ^{1 Tim. vi. 9.} *of all Evil*; and that *they that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare,* ^{10.} *and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition.*

There is indeed no command of God, but which upon some Occasion or other a Servant of *Mammon* must break, or else he is not true to his own Master; but there are a great many, which he must needs live in the constant and daily transgression of.

For God commands us to mind and attend to, daily and constantly, the Duties of his Worship and Service; to be diligent in the Study of the holy Scripture, and frequent in Prayer, and to spend a considerable Portion of our time in religious Exercises: But *Mammon*, on the other side, if he will suffer his Servants to have so much of a Form of Godliness, and to make so much Shew of Religion, as is necessary to give them a Credit and Reputation in the World, that's the most he will allow; for the Law of *Mammon* in general is to worship no other God but himself, and the *Golden Image* that he sets up; to have no more Godliness than we can make a Gain of; and whatever Love we shew to God with our Mouth, to let our Heart, at the same time, go after our Covetousness.

Again, God commands us to be true and just in all our Dealings, and to do no wrong to any Man in Word or Deed: But the contrary Law of *Mammon* is; get all you can, no matter by what Means you get it; look well to your own Profit, and never trouble your Head about other Men's Losses; your Business is to be rich, therein consists your Happiness; and there is nothing in the World that does so much cross this Design as a scrupulous Conscience; let your first Care therefore, in order to your growing rich, be to cast away that; rob, cheat, cozen, lye, forswear your self, any thing to get Money; and if you do but take Care to escape the Laws, all is well: The Money you get by these Means will wear as long, and do you as much good, as if you had come honestly by it.

Again, God commands us to give of our Goods to the Poor, to stretch forth our Hands to the Needy, to send our Treasure before us to Heaven in Works of Charity, and to *make to our selves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, who, when we fail, may receive us into everlasting Habitations*: *Mammon*, on the other side, commands us, to oppress the Poor to increase our own Riches; to get as much as we can by any Means, and to keep all we can get; to believe that the *unrighteous Mammon* will be a better Friend to us, than any we can make to our selves by parting with it; and never to run the Hazard of making our selves poor by dealing out our Bread to others.

Again, God commands us to make our Boast in the Lord, and to put our whole Trust and Confidence in him, and to *cast all our worldly Care*

upon him, believing that he careth for us: Mammon, on the other Side, says, that he has the most Cause to Glory who can boast himself in the multitude of his Riches, that the rich Man's Wealth is his strong City; and that the best Way is to take Care of our Bodies our selves, and if we must trust God with any thing, to trust him rather with our Souls; that the present Life is to be minded at present, and that if there be any Life hereafter, it will be time enough hereafter to provide for that.

Luke xiv. 26.

Ver. 33.

Lastly, to name no more; God commands us, to deny our selves, to take up our Cross and follow Christ; he tells us, that through much Tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God; that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer Persecution: And that even such as are not actually called to Suffering, must yet be of a Mind ready prepared to undergo the greatest Sufferings and Losses for a good Conscience. Our Saviour says, *If any Man will come to me, and hate not Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Brethren and Sisters, yea, and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple.* And, *whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple.* And he that is a Servant of God, and a Disciple of Christ upon these Terms, how can he be a Servant of Mammon? Can any two Commands be more contrary, than this evangelical Precept, enjoining us to sit thus loose from the World, is, to the prime Law of Mammon, commanding us to love the World, and the good things of it, and to place all our Happiness therein?

Thus, I hope, it appears, that *we cannot serve God and Mammon; i. e.* that Covetousness and true Religion are perfectly inconsistent. Which is the same Doctrine, that we are also taught by St. John, 1 Joh. ii. 15. *Love not the World, neither the things that are in the World; if any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him:* And by St. James, Jam. iv. 4. *Know ye not that the friendship of the World is Enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a Friend of the World is the Enemy of God.*

And now the most proper Conclusion to this Discourse, I suppose, will be by addressing my self to you in such manner as *Elijah* did to the *Israelites*, 1 Kings xviii. 21. *How long halt ye between two Opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal (if Mammon be God) then follow him:* Or as *Joshua* had done before, Josh. xxiv. 15. *Chuse you this Day whom you will serve, whether God or Mammon; for both, you see, you cannot serve; and if you should attempt to serve them both, you will do it in such a Manner as to be acceptable to neither. You may perhaps have so much Religion as may be some Hindrance to your Gain; but unless you are entirely God's Servants, you will not have Religion enough to carry you to Heaven; and so by grasping and catching at two things at once, you will lose them both. Chuse you then, I say, whom you will serve, whether God or Mammon: And that you may make a wise Choice, consider well, and compare together the Proposals that are made on both Sides, and take him for your Master, whose Service is the easiest, and who will pay you best for your Work.*

Mammon, on the one Side, offers you Riches, and seems to direct you to the ready Means of attaining them; but then you are to consider, that the Devil was a *Liar from the Beginning*, and that he seldom makes good his Promises. He told our first Parents, that upon eating the forbidden Fruit they would become as Gods; but it proved quite otherwise, for thereupon, of immortal and happy, they were immediately made mortal and miserable. And an infinite Number of these Servants of Mammon, who have taken those Courses, which he advised to, for the Attainment of Wealth, have met with a like sad Disappointment; and instead of that

Abundance

Abundance of Riches which they hoped for by these Means, have thereby been reduced to the extremest Poverty, have been brought to live upon the Basket, and to end their Lives in a Jail, or have forfeited them to the Law.

But if *Mammon* were always as good as his Word, yet still it is to be considered that he can do no more than he is able; and supposing him to be the God of Wealth, yet he is not the God of Life: And for the Attainment of Riches, time is as necessary as any thing else; so that you cannot be sure you shall not be disappointed for want of that. For how many are there, that when they are in the best Way of thriving, and have the fairest Prospect of a great Estate, are taken off by Death in the middle of their Course, and so never attain to their desired End? According to that Saying of the *Psalmist*, which we often see verified; *bloody and deceitful* ^{Psal. lv. 23.} *Men shall not live out half their Days*: And that of the Prophet, *he that getteth Riches and not by Right, shall leave them in the midst of his Days,* ^{Jer. xvii. 11.} *and at his End shall be a Fool.*

Or if there were no fear of Disappointment in this respect; if the *Mammonist* were sure to obtain his End, and to be as rich as he hoped to be, yet this is farther to be considered, that he cannot be sure he shall long possess his Wealth; either that may be taken from him, or he from that, before they have well met together; a Moth or Rust may corrupt his Treasure, or a Thief may take it from him; or it may be, that that very Night after he has filled his Barns, his own Soul may be required of him; and then whose shall all those things be that he has laboured for? Does not the *Psalmist* say very well, *Surely every Man walketh in a vain Shew, surely he is disquieted in vain; he heapeth up Riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.* ^{Psal. xxxix. 6.}

But if the *Mammonist* were likewise sure of this, that he should keep his Riches to the last, and live many Years to enjoy them; you will do well however to consider farther, what there is in the Possession of a great Estate, that can render a Man happy. For what is there to be enjoyed in a great Estate more than in a Competency? What can a very rich Man use upon himself more than another that has not so much? He may take indeed what he wants to use, out of a greater Heap than the other does; but if he needs no more than the other, and the other has as much as he needs, the other is as happy as he: And what he has more than the other, if it be kept, is no better to him than useless Lumber; or, if it be spent, it must be used and consumed by others, and he himself will be no better for it, than if he had it not. And this is the Observation of the Wise-Man, *Eccles. v. 10, 11. He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increase. And, when Goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the Owners thereof, saving the beholding them with their Eyes?*

And lastly, there is yet another sore Evil, well worth your Consideration, which the same *Wise-man*, at the thirteenth Verse of that Chapter, tells us he had seen under the Sun; namely, *Riches kept for the Owners thereof to their Hurt.* It many times happens, that a great Estate is so far from contributing to the Happiness of the Possessor thereof, that it is the Cause of his Misery and Ruin. Many a Man has fallen a Sacrifice to the Covetousness, Ambition, or Envy of other Men, only because he was rich; who if he had not been so rich, would not have been a Mark fit to be aimed at, but might have passed his Days in Peace and Plenty, and with the good Will of all.

Thus you see what Reward *Mammon* proposes to his Servants; and how slender and unsatisfactory it is at the best, and how uncertain they are to obtain it, who are the most diligent in his Service.

See now briefly on the other Side, the Reward that God proposes to his Servants; how great it is in it self, and what a good Assurance they have thereof.

1 Tim. iv. 8.

And *godliness* (as the *Apostle* says) *is profitable unto all things, having the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

1. It has the Promise of this Life; not indeed of such things as *Mammon* promises, *the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them*; not of Plenty and Abundance, not of Dainties and Delicacies; but of the Necessaries and Conveniences of this Life. *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,* says our *Saviour*, at the thirty third Verse of this Chapter; *all these things, i. e.* what you have need of to eat and drink and put on; for of these things, and these only, our *Saviour* had been before speaking.

But the Things of this Life which God gives to his Servants, in whatsoever Measure he gives them, are rather to be reckoned as Subsistence-Money than as Pay; they are necessary to carry us comfortably through this World to the other, and for that Reason only they are given, it is upon that Account only that they are desirable. For,

2. Our Reward is with God in Heaven; it is the Promise of the Life that is to come, that is the chief Encouragement that God gives to his Servants, and that to which his only true and faithful Servants have Regard.

1 Cor. ii. 9.

And the Happiness of Heaven, wherewith God has promised to reward the Obedience of his faithful Servants, does not consist, as the Happiness of the *Mammonist* does, in useless and perishing Treasure, but in substantial Riches; the *Inheritance* that is reserved in Heaven for us, is *incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away*: It is a Happiness that will not fail, but rather will much out-do their greatest Expectations; for *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

Rev. xxi. 4.

What that Happiness is, we know not well yet, because *we see but thro' a Glass darkly*; but this we know, that it is pure and unmixed; that when we shall be once admitted into it, *all Tears shall be wiped from our Eyes; that there shall be no more Death, neither Sorrow nor Crying; neither shall there be any more Pain.* And this we likewise know, that the fulness of Joy that there is in the Presence of God, and those Pleasures that are at his right Hand, are for evermore; that being once possessed of this Happiness we can never lose it, and that there will never be any Diminution or Decrease of it.

Ecclef. xli. 1.

Let the *Mammonist* have all that his Heart can wish, and let him keep it to the last, and let him enjoy as much Pleasure therein as he could ever hope for, still his Happiness can be but short-liv'd, for he must soon die, and leave all his Riches for others: And, *O Death, how bitter is the Remembrance of thee, to a Man that liveth at Rest in his Possessions, that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath Prosperity in all things?* And therefore, methinks, this Consideration alone (if we knew not, nor could conceive any other Difference between the Happiness of this World and of the next) should be sufficient to put it out of all doubt, which we ought to chuse; that *the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

I only add farther, that of this great and eternal Recompence of Reward which God has promised to his Servants, we have the greatest Assurance possible, infinitely greater than *Mammon* can give of earthly Riches to those that are most diligent in his Service; for we have the sure Promise of God for it, confirmed to us by the Blood of his Son; we have his Promise for it who is Truth it self, and for whom it is impossible to lye, and who is the same yesterday, to Day, and for ever; so that though Heaven and Earth may pass away, his Word cannot pass away or fail.

*

But

But I have not time now to enlarge farther upon this Subject, neither, I hope, is it needful. The Consideration of that little which has been already said upon it, is, I hope, sufficient to determine our Choice, and to engage every one of us to join not only with our Mouth, but with our Heart, and with Truth and Sincerity, in those Words of the *Israelites*, before spoken of ^{1 Kings xviii.} to *Elijah* and to *Joshua*, *the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God: And, ^{39.} the Lord our God will we serve, and his Voice will we obey.* ^{Josh. xxiv. 25.}

Which that we may always do, let us *humbly beseech* him, *that as by* ^{Collect for Easter-Day,} *his special Grace preventing us, he does put into our Mind good Desires, so by his continual Help we may bring the same to good Effect, through Jesus Christ our Lord: To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory now and for ever. Amen.*



DISCOURSE LIX.

Worldly Cares not absolutely forbidden.

MATH. VI. 25.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.



HERE is nothing more contrary to the divine and heavenly Life, than an inordinate Love of this World, nor any greater Hindrance to the Practice of Holiness and Virtue, than an immoderate Care for the good Things of this Life: And our Love of these Things, and our Care about them, are then inordinate and immoderate, when they exceed the just Bounds which both Reason and Religion have set thereunto: *i.e.* Either, 1. when the Object of our Care and Desire is greater than it ought to be, when we desire more than is necessary and convenient, and cannot be satisfied with what is enough; and this is properly called Covetousness. Or else, 2. when tho' what we are careful about, and solicitous to procure, be no more than what we might fairly wish for; *viz.* necessary Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, such Things, without which we cannot live at all, or not with any Comfort, our Desire thereof is more passionate, and our Care and Endeavour to procure the same more anxious and solicitous, than 'tis reasonable they should be.

1. When the Object of our Care and Desire is greater than it ought to be, when we desire more than is necessary and convenient, and cannot be satisfied with what is enough: And this Branch of worldly Care our *Saviour* had forbidden at the nineteenth Verse of this Chapter, in these Words, *Lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth; i.e.* do not set your Heart upon Riches, nor make it the Design of your Life to obtain them. And how inconsistent such Covetousness is with true Religion, he shews in the Verse before the Text, by applying a common proverbial Speech, generally acknowledged and assented to, to this Case; *No Man, says he, can serve two Masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and Mammon; i.e.* ye cannot be the true Servants of God, not so constant and sincere in his Worship, not so strictly obedient to his Precepts as you ought to be, so long as your Mind is set upon Wealth, and your chief Desire and Design is to be rich, and your Heart goeth after your Covetousness. But this now is what few will own, that they are covetous; provident, it may be, they will grant they are, and careful; but then 'tis not, they say, Abundance and Superfluities that they are so concerned about,

about, but only Necessaries; only because they do not know whether hereafter they shall be so well able to provide for themselves, as they are now, they are, they confess, for treasuring up what they can now, against a Time of Need: But then the Design of their treasuring up, is not, they say, the same with that of covetous Men, who are for hoarding up more than they can use, or ever intend to use, and who love Money only to look upon it; for all that they mean and design, is only to have wherewithal to support Nature, Meat, Drink and Cloaths. And in this they hope there is no harm.

And indeed, if the Care that we exercise about this be moderate, and we labour for these Necessaries of Life, in a Dependence upon God's Providence; and if we have not Means at present to make Provision for the future Time, can trust in God, that he will supply us hereafter with such Things as we shall hereafter have need of; I suppose our Care about these Things is moderate and lawful.

But nevertheless, as I observed before, there may be sometimes a Fault, even in this necessary Care; and there is so, when altho' what we are careful about, and solicitous to procure, be no more than what we may fairly and reasonably desire; viz. necessary Meat, Drink, and Cloaths; such Things as either we can't live without, or not with any Comfort; our Desire thereof is more passionate, and our Care and Endeavour to procure the same more anxious and solicitous, than 'tis reasonable they should be.

And 'tis this sort of inordinate Desire of, and Carefulness for the Things of this World, that we are in particular forbidden, and dissuaded from by our Saviour, in the Words which I have now read to you. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.*

For here the subject Matter spoken of, is not unprofitable Treasures, but needful Provision: Not Honour or Greatness, nor the Vanities or Superfluities of Life, (which are the proper Objects of Ambition or Covetousness) but only the meer Necessaries of Life, those Things without which Life it self cannot be maintained; what we have Occasion for, to eat, drink, and put on; in our Design and Endeavour after which, we may nevertheless be guilty of Excess: And by the Connexion that is made between these Words and the foregoing, by the Word, *Therefore; Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, &c.* it is clearly implied, that a Man may be a Servant of Mammon, who is immoderately careful even for Necessaries; as well as he is, who sets his Heart upon Riches, and is careful for Unnecessaries and Superfluities. *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.*

In discoursing on which Words, I shall do these three Things.

I. I shall enquire whether it be reasonable to understand this and such like general Prohibitions of worldly Care, in the utmost Latitude and Extent; i. e. whether all Carefulness and Concern about this Life, and the necessary Means of supporting and maintaining it, was designed to be forbidden by our Saviour in this Place.

II. I shall shew what Carefulness and Concern about them is without doubt inordinate and excessive, and was, most certainly, intended to be hereby forbidden.

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew the Sinfulness and Unreasonableness of such Care, and to dissuade from it.

I. I shall enquire, Whether it be reasonable to understand this and such like general Prohibitions of worldly Care, in the utmost Latitude and Extent; i. e.

i. e. Whether all Carefulness and Concern about this Life, and the necessary Means of supporting and maintaining it, was meant to be forbidden by our Saviour in this Place. *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.* And taking the Words as they sound in our Translation, and as they may be understood, it should seem as if it were our Duty to live perfectly without Care; to eat the Meat that falls down before us, as the *Manna* did to the *Israelites* in the Wilderness; or to take the Fruits which the Earth brings forth of its self, and to drink of the Brook that is in our Way; and to cover our Nakedness with Fig-leaves taken from the next Tree; or with the Skins of a Beast that we happen to find by chance: But neither to sow nor plant, neither to weave nor spin, to have neither Store-house nor Barn; and if no Provision comes of it self in our Way, to sit down contentedly and die.

But that it was not our Saviour's Design to command such Carelessness as this, will, I suppose, sufficiently appear, if these following Things be considered.

1. That the Words of the Text, taken in the strictest Sense, and even as they are express'd in our Translation, *Take no Thought for your Life*, do not forbid such *Labour* as is necessary to procure the Things that are needful for the Preservation of Life; the most that they can be thought to forbid is a *Carefulness*, and *Concern*, and *Solicitude* about it; but now these two Things are manifestly distinct and different, and such as may be separated, *viz.* *Labour* and *Care*, *Pains* and *Thoughtfulness*, the *Work* of the *Body*, and the *Working* of the *Mind*: A Man may labour as much as is needful to provide Necessaries for Life, and yet not be much concerned about his Life; be very indifferent whether it be long or short; be very willing to go out of the World whenever God pleases, and by what Way he pleases: So that these Words, taken in the utmost Extent, are *no Prohibition* of *bodily Labour*, *no Command* of *Sloth* and *Idleness*.

2. It may be farther considered that the Words in the Original do not signify so much as seems to be expressed in our Translation; for the Words in the Original are, *μὴ μερμνᾶτε*, but now *μερμνε*, if it be expounded according to its supposed Derivation, is that which may be said *μερμζειν* *vsu*, *i. e.* such Care and Thoughtfulness only, as does divide and distract the Mind, and takes it off from the Care of other Things, about which it should be concerned: But all worldly Care does not do this, but only such Care as is excessive or unreasonable; such Care as is grounded upon Infidelity, or is an Hindrance to the Practice and Exercise of Religion: If therefore our Care for the Body be not of this kind, if it be neither the *Effect* nor the *Cause* of *Irreligion*, then it is not that *μερμνο*, that *taking Thought for the Life*, that is here prohibited.

3. This Exposition of the Words is farther confirmed, by a Place parallel to the Text, in *Luke* xii. 29. *Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful Mind*; for there, tho' the Prohibition in the former part of the Verse be universal and unlimited, *seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink*; yet there is a plain Restriction or Limitation in the latter Part, *neither be ye of doubtful Mind*; *i. e.* live not in careful Suspence, be not anxious and troubled in your Minds about the necessary Means of preserving your Life, Meat, Drink and Cloaths.

Now there is manifestly a great and wide Difference, between barely *seeking*, in the diligent Exercise of some lawful Calling, to procure the Necessaries of Life, and being *anxious* and *solicitous* thereabouts; for we may take such Pains, and use such Means, as are necessary to supply our temporal Wants, and yet not vex and disquiet our Minds with the Thoughts thereof: And therefore it being this only which our Saviour forbids in the latter Clause of that

Verse, it is reasonable to suppose that he meant to forbid nothing more in the former; for it is by no means agreeable to the Use and Custom of Speech, first to forbid more, and immediately after to forbid less; first to forbid a Thing in the whole, and then immediately after to forbid it only in part: But it is evident, that in the latter Clause of those Words, (*be not of doubtful Mind,*) our Saviour forbids only such Care, as is accompanied with Anxiety of Mind, or a Distrust of God's Goodness and Providence. And what need was there of his forbidding such Care as this, if it be supposed that in the former Clause he had forbidden all manner of worldly Care whatsoever? For the general Prohibition of all Care, would have included in it a Prohibition of this particular kind of Care altho' it had not been expressly named. It is more reasonable therefore to suppose, that our Saviour, by that latter Clause, (*neither be ye of doubtful Mind,*) intended to explain, and to lay a Restriction upon the former, which otherwise might have been understood in a more general and universal Sense than he intended it: As if he had said, *seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink*; that is, I do not mean that ye should not desire nor seek for these Things at all, but only that ye should not do it with a doubtful Mind, with careful Suspence, with troublesome Anxiety.

And that this is a true Account of the Meaning both of those Words and of the Text, may farther appear in the fourth Place:

4. By considering some other Texts of Scripture, wherein the Nature of that worldly Care, which we are to avoid, is more plainly expressed:

As particularly, that at the thirty first Verse of this Chapter; *Take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?* Which are plainly the Words of a Man, that doubts of, or distrusts the divine Providence, and is afraid, that when he has done all he can, or ought in Prudence and Conscience to do, in order to the procuring of those Things which are necessary for the Body, he shall nevertheless not be able to obtain a Competency thereof, but shall perish for want of them. To which may be added, that in *Phil. iv. 6. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto God:* Where the Carefulness, which the Apostle forbids, is plainly such, as takes off our Dependence upon God, and is grounded upon a Disbelief of God's Providence, and implies too great Confidence in our own Endeavours. To which may be added, some other Places, where to the Prohibition of worldly Care, there is immediately added a Command to set our Love upon, or exercise our Care about, some other Matter.

Thus, in *Luke xii. 31.* after our Saviour had said, *Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful Mind; for all these Things do the Nations of the World seek after, and your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these Things;* he immediately adds, *but rather seek ye the Kingdom of God:* Where the Command to seek this rather, manifestly implies that we may seek the other Things too, provided that we do it with less Carefulness and Concern than we seek this.

Thus also, in *John vi. 27.* it is said, *Labour not for the Meat that perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life: Labour not for that, but labour for this, i.e. plainly, do not labour so much for that, be not so much concerned for that as for this.* Some Pains therefore we may take, some small Concern we may have about *that*; but only it must not be so great for the Meat that perisheth, as for that which endureth unto everlasting Life.

And so again, in *Col. iii. 2. Set your Affections on Things above, and not on Things on the Earth; i.e. set them on those, rather than on these:* For 'tis not only lawful, but our necessary Duty, to bestow some Part of our Affection upon some of the Things on Earth, as namely, our Friends, our Relations,

tions, our Country, and the like, and to love them in due Measure; but then our Love to these Things, or even to our Life it self, must be so moderate, as that in Comparison with our Love of heavenly Things, which ought to be far greater, it may be accounted as none at all.

But this is most clearly of all intimated in that Opposition which is made between worldly and spiritual Care, at the thirty first and thirty third Verses of this Chapter; *Take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be cloathed? But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness.* By which it appears, that it was not our Saviour's Design, in this universal Prohibition, *take no Thought*, to forbid all manner of worldly Care, and even the least Degree of it; for if it had, he would not have said in the following Words, *seek first the Kingdom of God*; but rather, *seek that*, and *seek nothing else*. But by bidding us seek the Kingdom of God *first*, i. e. *primarily* and *chiefly*, he plainly gives us leave to seek the other Things too, but only with a *less*, with a *subordinate*, with a *secondary* Care.

It is not, therefore, all Care for the Body which our Saviour condemns, but such a Care only as is irregular and exorbitant, such a Care as is inconsistent with, or doth greatly hinder us in our necessary Care about other Matters, which are of infinitely greater Importance to us.

For the farther Proof of which, it may be considered in the fifth Place:

5. That this Prohibition of worldly Care, understood in that Extent, as if it forbid all Care for the Body, and the Things belonging to it and necessary for its Support, would be perfectly contradictory to several express Commands in holy Scripture, wherein we are enjoined to be diligent and industrious in our lawful Callings, for the Maintenance of our selves, and those that belong to us.

Thus, in *Eph. iv. 28.* *Let him that stole (says the Apostle) steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing that is good; (i. e. being exercised in some lawful Trade or Profession; and this not only for his own Support, but also for the Relief of others, that are not able to work; for so it follows,) that he may have to give to him that needs.*

And this even the Apostles themselves did, who yet certainly well understood our Lord's Meaning; and who, if any, might reasonably be thought exempted from labouring; and they did it, not merely for their own Support, but partly also to shew a good Example to others: Thus, *Acts xx. 34, 35.* *Ye your selves, says St. Paul, know, that these Hands have ministered unto my Necessities, and to them that were with me: I have shewed you all Things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the Weak.*

And indeed, there is scarcely any Thing that the same Apostle, in his Epistles, enjoins more strictly, than that all Men, according to their Abilities, and in the Callings they were in, should be diligent and industrious, *doing their own Business, and working with their own Hands*, that so they might *walk honestly towards those that were without*, i. e. that the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles might not be scandaliz'd at the Christian Religion, as if it taught or encouraged Men in Sloth and Idleness; and made them, after their Conversion to it, become useless Drones, and unprofitable Members of the World. That was one Reason why he enjoined them Labour: The other was *that they might have Lack of nothing*; as you may see, *1 Thess. iv. 12.* plainly intimating, that if they would not labour, they might lack even Necessaries, notwithstanding all the Promises of God to take care of and supply them with needful Things; those Promises being all conditional, and made only to such as are not wanting to themselves.

And

And in 2 *Theff.* iii. 6. he calls all those who were idle, and followed no Employment, *disorderly Walkers*, strictly enjoining, that such as, being able, would not labour for their own Support, should be rather suffered to starve, than have any Relief given them by others. *We command you*, says he, *in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Tradition which he received of us: For ye your selves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not our selves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any Man's Bread for nought, but wrought with Labour and Travel Night and Day.* The Apostle, you see, was far enough from discouraging honest Labour and Industry. And this, he says in the tenth Verse, was agreeable to the Command which he had formerly given them, that if *any Man* was lazy, and *would not work, neither should he eat*; which Command he now repeats again, because he had heard that there were some *disorderly Walkers* among them, *who worked not at all*; whom he therefore *commands and exhorts* by the Lord Jesus Christ, that *with Quietness they work, and eat their own Bread*, ver. 11. Moreover,

6. It is not reasonable to suppose that our Saviour designed in these Words, to forbid wholly all worldly Care and Labour whatsoever, because ordinarily our Life it self cannot be maintained, without some caring and labouring for those Things which are necessary to support it; so that by wholly neglecting the Care of our Life, we should in Consequence neglect also the Care of our Souls, and deprive our selves of Space and Opportunity to make such Provision for a future State as we are bound to do; so that consequently, a Command to *seek the Kingdom of God, to work out our own Salvation, to labour for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*, and the like, is so far from forbidding all worldly Care, that it rather includes in it a Command to have some Care for this Life; and also to be at some Pains and Labour to maintain and prolong it: Because whenever this Life fails us, we can no longer *seek the Kingdom of God, or work out our Salvation, or labour for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*; for when we cease to live here, we enter immediately into an unalterable State, and 'twill be too late then to make Provision for a future State, when all that Time in which we were to do it is expired. Now, while this Life lasts, we may work, but *when the Night comes no Man can work: There is no working in the Grave* (as the *Wise-Man* says) *whither we are going*; and whither indeed we must quickly go, if we take no Thought for our Life; for ever since the Ground was cursed for our Sin, it hath been likewise a Curse entailed upon the whole Race of Mankind, from which there are none altogether exempted, that *in the Sweat of their Brows they must eat their Bread*. So that Care and Labour is now, by the divine Appointment, the only Way and Means whereby we can maintain our selves in Life; and we can no more, without offending God, neglect the necessary Means of preserving Life, than we can desert our Station without his Leave who placed us in it; or throw up, or give away our Lives, (otherwise than at God's Command) before he who gave us Life, is pleased himself to take it from us again, by an ordinary and natural Death.

It being therefore our Duty to maintain and prolong this temporal Life as long as we can, in Obedience to God's Command, and that we may have the more Time to *work out our Salvation*, it must needs also be our Duty to take some Care, and to be at some Pains for this Purpose, because it cannot be done without Care and Pains; for 'tis unreasonable to expect, that God should provide for us in a wonderful and miraculous Way, when we wilfully neglect those Means, which he has ordained and appointed, and which are ordinarily sufficient for that Purpose.

In a Time of Famine indeed, he was pleased once to order the Ravens (the most unlikely of all Birds to perform such a Message faithfully) to bring Bread

1 Kings xvii. 4, 6. *Bread and Flesh* to his Prophet *Elijah*; and at another Time he was pleased to multiply the *Widow's Oil*, for the Sustainance of him, and her, and her Family. And so also when his People of *Israel* were kept forty Years in a barren Wilderness, he was pleased to rain down Bread from Heaven for their Sustainance: But it is expressly noted, *Josh. v. 12.* that as soon as ever they were so far possessed of the Land of *Canaan*, as that the Fruit of the Country, which is brought forth with the Help of Man's Labour, was sufficient for their Sustainance, *the Manna ceased on the Morrow, after they had eaten of the old Corn of the Land, neither had the Children of Israel Manna any more.*

And as then the Earth did not bring forth her Fruit without their Tillage, so neither is it to be expected that it should do so now; and therefore so far is all worldly Care and Pains from being unlawful, that the Neglect thereof is a Sin: And if we perish for want of Necessaries, when the only Cause of our Want of them, is because we will be at no Care and Pains to procure them, we shall in right Reason and the Judgment of God be deemed Murderers of our selves.

Nay, it is not only an unreasonable, but a wicked Expectation, to look that God should provide for us by a Miracle, when he has put it in our Power, by honest Labour and Industry, with the Blessing of his ordinary Providence, to provide for our selves: For this is to tempt God, a Sin which we are frequently warned against in the holy Scripture; it is to make a Trial whether he will do a Thing for us which it is unbecoming his Wisdom to do; whether he will work a Miracle when there is no need of it: For this our Saviour himself calls a *tempting of God*, as you may see in *Math. iv. 6, 7.* For there the Devil, in his Temptation of our Saviour, moved him to cast himself down from a Pinnacle of the Temple, telling him, that if he was the Son of God, he might do it without Danger, and citing a Text of Scripture to prove it; *for it is written*, says he, *he shall give his Angels Charge concerning thee, and in their Hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy Foot against a Stone.* And the Devil's Argument seems to be a very good one; for this Promise of God, which the Devil cites out of the ninety first Psalm, was a general Promise of the divine Care and Protection of good Men: And if God had such Care of all good Men, who are his Sons only by Adoption and Grace, much more might our Saviour, if he was (as he gave out he was) the Only Begotten Son of God, safely depend upon it, that he would have a greater Care of him, to keep him from any Hurt, what Danger soever he cast himself into. *If therefore thou be the Son of God, cast thy self down*, says the Devil; there's no Danger of thy getting any Hurt by the Fall, if thou art so dear to him as the Son of God most certainly is to his Father. But this Temptation of the Devil, our Saviour puts off, by citing another Place of Scripture, whereby he shews that it is altogether unwarrantable to run our selves into Danger which we may avoid, in a Dependence upon the Providence of God to deliver us out of it; *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:* As if he had said, God has promised indeed to take care of, and protect his faithful Servants, to watch over them by his Providence, to keep them from Danger, and to deliver them out of it; but this Promise supposes, that they are prudently careful of themselves, that they do not neglect the Means of their own Safety, that they do not run themselves into needless Dangers; and if they are wilfully wanting to themselves, they are no longer under the divine Protection. And to expect that God should work a Miracle for their Preservation, when they might have been preserved by the Blessing of his ordinary Providence, upon their own prudent Care of themselves, is a *tempting of God*; i.e. it is putting upon God to do a Thing which it is unworthy of God to do; it is a trying of him, whether he will countenance our Folly and Rashness, whether he will do that for us

in a miraculous Way, which we will not do for our selves by our own Endeavours, prospered and succeeded by the Blessing of his ordinary Providence; this is *tempting of God*.

And it is so, by the same Reason, to neglect the Means of our own Preservation, by providing for our selves, according as we are able, in an honest Way, such Things as are necessary for the Preservation of Life, and then to expect that God should provide for us by a Miracle; for what is this but to tempt God? to try whether he will countenance our Sloth and Idleness? whether he will give his Approbation to our Neglect of those Means, which he himself has appointed, and in the ordinary Course of his Providence made necessary, for the Support of this temporal Life?

When therefore we are here commanded by our Saviour, to *take no Thought for our Life*; and by the Apostle, to *cast all our Care upon God, who careth for us*; the Meaning is not, that we should cast upon him the Care of the Means, which he has appointed us to use, but only that we should cast upon him the Care of the Event, which is perfectly in his Disposal: Not that we should have no Thought about what is the Matter of our own Duty, (and such it is to be honestly industrious in some lawful Calling to get a Living) but that we should not be thoughtful about the Success of our Endeavours; but leave it to God, to order for us such a Portion as he thinks best; believing that he knows what is best, and that he will do what is best for us.

And these Considerations are, I suppose, sufficient to shew, that the Design of our Saviour, in this seemingly universal Prohibition of all worldly Care and Labour, *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on*, was not to countenance or encourage Sloth and Idleness, was not wholly to forbid such Thought as is necessary for, and does actually conduce towards, the procuring of such Provision for the Body as is needful for its Support; but only to regulate and moderate our worldly Care, and to restrain and keep it within just Bounds.

And the Reason of my insisting so long upon this Point, is chiefly for the Satisfaction of some scrupulous Persons, whose hard Circumstances in the World oblige them to rise early, and to sit up late, and to *eat the Bread of Carefulness*; i. e. to undergo hard and almost continual Labour, for the Maintenance of themselves and Families; and all little enough; being perhaps, after all, scarcely able to make a shift to live: And while they have so much worldly Care upon them, and are constrained to spend so much Time in providing Necessaries for themselves and those that depend upon them, they cannot spare so much as they would do, and as they think they ought to do, for the Duties and Exercises of Religion. And this some scrupulous Persons not only bewail as a Calamity, but are likewise apt to censure in themselves as a Fault: But, I think, without any Reason.

It is true, indeed, he is too busy for the World, be his Circumstances ever so hard, who can spare no Time for Religion; but it is a Mistake to think, that Religion consists only in reading, and hearing, and praying, and other Exercises of Devotion; for these are but a Part of Religion; and another Part of it, and which God designed should take up the greater Share of most Mens Time, is *serving our Generation according to the Will of God*, by Diligence and Honesty in our Callings, and a constant Carefulness to discharge the Duties of all those Relations wherein we stand to others. And as he who neglects the Duties and Offices of Devotion, in their proper Season, may reasonably be thought an *Atheist* or an *Infidel*, to have little or no Religion in him; so, on the other side, we are told by St. Paul, 1 Tim. v. 8. that *he that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own House, hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel*.

Let not any Man therefore think that Care superfluous or sinful, which he is forced to be at to support his Family; for at the same Time that he labours for their Support, in the Exercise of a lawful Calling, he is truly labouring also to very good Purpose for himself, and working out his own Salvation; honest Labour being to those that have not otherwise wherewith to live, a Duty no less necessary, even than the Worship of God is. And if a Man's Circumstances are such, and the Charge that he has to maintain be so great, that he cannot spend so much Time in Acts of Worship and Devotion, as they may do who have more Leisure, and fewer worldly Cares, and less need to labour; for that very Reason it will not be required or expected from him, that he should read so much, or pray so often, or be so long in his Devotions, as they may and ought to be, who have greater Leisure, and fewer worldly Avocations; for 'tis a standing Rule of the Gospel, that when there is not Time and Opportunity for both, *God will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice.*

But this, I suppose, is a Point that most Men will be easily enough convinced of, *viz.* that they may lawfully bestow some Care and Pains in making some Provision for this Life: The great Difficulty of all, I presume, will be, to convince them, that it is possible for them to spend too much Care, and Pains, and Time about it.

But certainly, if these Words of the Text are a part of the Gospel, and they were spoken with any Design at all; *take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink;* the Meaning thereof must at least be this, that there is an Excess of Carefulness, even about the most necessary Things of Life, which it is our Duty to avoid.

This therefore was the second Thing which I propounded to do, in speaking to these Words, *viz.*

II. To shew, what Carefulness and Concern about these Matters is inordinate and excessive, and was most certainly intended to be forbidden by our Saviour in these Words. But the handling of this Head will be Matter enough for another Discourse, the next Opportunity.



It is true, indeed, that to hard, who can spare no time for Religion, and who think that Religion consists only in prayer, and other Exercises of Devotion; and which God designs the greater share of man's Time to be serving our Creator, and being in our Callings, and constant Carefulness to discharge the Duties of all those Relations wherein we stand to others. And as he who neglects the Duties and Offices of Devotion, in their proper season, may reasonably be thought an Atheist or an Infidel, to have little or no Religion in him; so, on the other side, we are told by St. Paul, 1 Tim. v. 8. that he that provides not for his own, and especially for those of his own House, has denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel.

DISCOURSE LXII.

What worldly Cares are prohibited.

MATTH. VI. 25.

Therefore I say unto you, take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.



N discursing on these Words, I have already proposed to do these three things.

I. To enquire, whether it be reasonable to understand this and such like general Prohibitions of worldly Care, in the utmost Latitude and Extent; i. e. whether all Carefulness and Concern about this Life, and the necessary Means of supporting and maintaining it, was designed to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in this Place.

II. To shew, what Carefulness and Concern about them is without doubt inordinate and excessive, and was most certainly intended to be hereby forbidden. And,

III. Lastly, to endeavour to shew the sinfulness and Unreasonableness of such Care, and to dissuade from it.

The first of these Heads I have already spoken to; and have shewed, I suppose, plainly enough, that the Design of our *Saviour* in this seemingly universal Prohibition of all worldly Care and Labour; *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body what ye shall put on*; was not to countenance or encourage Sloth and Idleness, was not wholly to forbid such Thought, as is necessary for, and does actually conduce towards, the procuring of such Provision for the Body as is needful for its Support.

But this I suppose is a Point that most Men will be easily enough convinced of; viz. that they may lawfully bestow some Care and Pains in making competent Provision for this Life: The great Difficulty of all, I presume, will be, to convince them, that it is possible for them to spend too much Care and Pains about it: This, I say, is a Point, that I doubt, Men will more hardly be persuaded of.

But

But certainly, if these Words of the Text, are a Part of the Gospel, and if they were spoken with any Meaning or Design at all; *take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink*; or if those other parallel Places mentioned the last time; *seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; labour not for the Meat that perisheth*, and the like, were uttered by our Saviour to any Purpose, and he meant to forbid any thing thereby; the Meaning thereof must at least be this, that there is an Excess of Carefulness, even about the most necessary things of Life, which it is our Duty to avoid.

And indeed there was great Need, and good Reason, why we should be cautioned to avoid it; because it is a thing that Men are exceeding prone to, to be more thoughtful about these Matters, than is consistent with a firm Belief of God's Goodness and Providence, and a due Care of their greater Concerns, the Welfare of their Souls, and the Provision for a future Life. And this they are, not only when they trouble themselves needlessly, about more than they can ever probably have real Occasion to use; but also, altho' the Subject of their thoughtfulness, be only the Necessaries of Life, *what they shall eat, and drink, and put on*: For unless this were a Matter wherein Men might be too thoughtful and solicitous, there would have been no Ground nor Reason for our Saviour to forbid them to be so.

And besides, the only good Reason of our desiring and labouring even for Necessaries, is in order to the maintaining and prolonging our own Life, and the Lives of those that depend upon us: But we may be too fond even of Wife and Children; and there are some Cases, wherein it is rather our Duty to hate and forsake them; nay, we may love even our own Life too much, for there are some Cases wherein we ought willingly to lose or lay it down: And therefore, if we may be too much concerned and solicitous about the End, we may certainly be so likewise about the Means; which are in no other Respect the just Objects of our Care and Concern, but only as they are the necessary Means of obtaining our End.

From what hath been said therefore it plainly appears, that we may be guilty of an Excess, and commit a Sin, in caring even for the most necessary Provisions of Life; that we may desire and seek even them too much: So that though there be no Fault in the Object of our Desire (for we may surely desire those things, without which we cannot live, necessary Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, and the like,) yet there may be an Excess and Inordinateness in the Degree of our desiring them.

And this leads me to the second thing proposed, which was,

II. To shew, what Carefulness and Concern about these Matters is certainly inordinate and excessive, and was undoubtedly intended to be forbidden by our Saviour in these Words; *take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on*. And,

I. First of all, we are hereby plainly forbidden to be more careful about these Matters, than it is needful we should be in order to procure them.

And then we may truly be said to be more careful about these things than needs, when we are careful about them with such a Sort of Care and Solicitude, as does no good, and produces no real Effect. *Take no Thought*, *μη μεριμνήτε*, do not trouble your Heads, and be solicitous about it. For mere thoughtfulness about a Thing does or works nothing of its self; it is only the putting in Practice those Means, that are proper for the accomplishing our Design, that must accomplish it. To follow our Business close, while we are at it, is a proper Way to effect it; but to be perpetually musing and thinking the same things over and over again, when we have no Opportunity

tunity of Action, is nothing else but an idle Mispence of Time. For it is the *diligent Hand*, as *Solomon* says, (not the thoughtful Head, which does nothing but think) that *maketh rich*. While we are employed about any necessary Work and Business, it is indeed fit and reasonable that we should mind it, because we cannot do it without minding it; but when our Work is done, it is as reasonable then to take our Minds also from it, because then our Thoughtfulness signifies nothing towards it, but is rather only an Hindrance to us from taking in Hand such other Business as we ought then to set our selves to.

They therefore do manifestly transgress the Precept of the Text, which forbids us *to be thoughtful what we shall eat, and drink, and put on*, who are ever, Night and Day, thinking of the World and the Business of it; whose Heads, even sleeping as well as waking, are never clear of worldly Care and Thoughtfulness; who are ever plodding upon Business, even then when they have neither Time nor Ability to act, but think to, as little Purpose as if they had not thought at all; their Thoughtfulness being rather a deep and stupid Melancholy, than a wise Forecast, or prudent Contrivance of Matters.

2. Our Care even for the most necessary things of Life, Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, is then a sinful Care, when it is unseasonable; for *there is*, as *Solomon* says, *a Time for all Things*; there is therefore a Time to work, and there is also a Time to cease from Work: And to mind our worldly Businesses, at those times wherein we ought to be minding other things, is most certainly one Instance of that Thoughtfulness about the World, that was meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in this Place.

And if it be asked, what Times in particular are unseasonable to mind our worldly Business in? the Answer is easy, *viz.* those Times, which are already allotted and set apart to the Uses of Religion. *Six Days shalt thou Labour* (says God in the fourth Commandment) *and do all thy Work; but the seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any Work, thou, nor thy Son, nor thy Daughter, thy Man servant, nor thy Maid servant, nor thy Cattle, nor thy Strangers that is within thy Gates.*

It is then therefore, most certainly, unseasonable to be minding our worldly Business, when we should be at Church, worshipping of God; and it is then yet rather more unseasonable to mind it, when we are at Church, worshipping God, or hearing his holy Word. For this, besides the other Fault of it, is gross Hypocrisy, and a mocking of God, thinking to please him with the Lip, or Knee, or bodily Worship, without the Worship of the Soul, with which God, as he is a Spirit, is most delighted; for as our *Saviour* says, in *John* iv. 23. *The Hour cometh, and now is, when the true Worshipers, (i. e. the only Persons that worship him acceptably) shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him: And the Reason follows in the next Verse, God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.* And our *Saviour* again, in *Matth* xv. 8, declares the Worship of those Men to be vain and altogether unacceptable to God, who draw near to him with their Mouths, and honour him with their Lips, while their Heart is far from him. And it is mentioned in *Ezek* xxxiii. 31. as a notorious Instance of the great Wickedness of the Jews, that when they were, to outward Appearance, worshipping God, or hearing his Word, their Minds were all the while taken up with Thoughts of the World. *They come unto thee (says God there to the Prophet) as the People cometh, and they sit before thee as my People, and they hear thy Words, but they will not do them; for with their Mouth they shew much Love, but their Heart goeth after their Covetousness.*

3. Our worldly Care is also then plainly excessive and inordinate, and such as was meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in this Place, when it is not justly proportioned to the true Worth and Value of those things that we are careful about.

For the least that can possibly be meant, when we are bidden in universal Terms, *not to lay up Treasures upon Earth*, nay, *not to seek what we shall eat, and what we shall drink*; and when we are forbidden, without any Exception, to *labour for the Meat that perisheth*, or to *take any Thought for our Life*; (the least, I say, that can possibly be meant by these and such like Texts) must be this; that our Care and Concern about this temporal Life, and the necessary Means of preserving it, ought to be in Measure and Proportion less, than that which we are in the same Text commanded to have, about other things which we are there commanded to seek and to labour for; as is also plain from the Opposition that is made between them; *labour not for the Meat that perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*; i. e. at least, labour not so much for *that* as for *this*, be not so much concerned about *that* as about *this*. So again in *Luke* xii. 29, 31. *Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, but seek rather the Kingdom of God*. And so again at the thirty first and thirty third Verses of this Chapter; *Take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek first the Kingdom of God*; i. e. seek the Kingdom of God rather: *Seek the Kingdom of God first*; it is plainly as if he had said, if you do seek at all for other Things, as *what ye shall eat, and drink, and put on*, you ought however to seek them less, to be less concerned and solicitous about *them*, than you are about *this*.

So that if our Care for this World be more and greater than our Care for the next World, i. e. if we are more concerned and solicitous to make easy and pleasant, and to prolong, this temporal Life, than we are to secure our everlasting Happiness in the other World; and are more careful for the Preservation of the Body, than we are for the Welfare of the Soul, we cannot but in Reason be thought to transgress this Precept. And from hence also it plainly follows farther, in the fourth Place,

4. That our worldly Care is then likewise inordinate and excessive, and more than it ought to be, even although it be only for the mere Necessaries of Life, *what we shall eat, and drink, and put on*; when it is such a Care as hinders us from taking a due Care of our spiritual Concerns, which deserve our Care a great deal more; i. e. when we are so wholly taken up with worldly Care, as to have no Leisure, or not enough, left for the Care of our Souls, and so are forced either wholly to neglect Matters of infinitely greater Concern to us, or else to postpone and put by them to the last, which ought to have been the first and chiefest in our Thoughts.

And this indeed seems to be the thing chiefly meant here by our *Saviour* in this Prohibition of worldly Care; as appears by that opposite Command, which both here, at the thirty third Verse of this Chapter, and also in *Luke* xii. he immediately subjoins thereunto; *but seek ye first, or, rather seek ye the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*. That therefore is certainly too much Care for the Body, which puts by another Care which ought to be before it.

And indeed what more notorious Instance of Folly can there be, than to be exceedingly concerned and solicitous about Trifles, neglecting at the same time Matters of far greater Importance? Do we not in our worldly Affairs and Concerns proceed quite otherwise? Having two Businesses on our Hands, do we not always concern our selves most about that, which

deserves it most? And if we doubt whether we shall have time enough for both, do we not always take that in Hand first, which is of the greatest Concern, and put off that till the last, which may with the least Loss be left undone, in case our time should happen to fail us?

5. Our worldly Care is yet more plainly a sinful Care, and such as was designed to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in this Place, when it is such as betrays us to the Commission of Sin, *i. e.* when to get a Livelihood, we use any unlawful Means; exercise our selves in any unlawful Trade; do any Ways assist or promote the Sins of other Men; are unjust in our Dealings; fraudulent in our Contracts; or go beyond or over-reach our Brother in any Matter.

For our Life it self is not worth the keeping, any longer than we can keep it without sinning; and it is the greatest Folly and Madness in the World, by seeking to preserve it by unlawful Means, to forfeit the Love and Favour of Almighty God, which is *better than Life* it self.

Besides, Death is a Debt which we owe to Nature, and which we must all certainly pay some time or other: What great Matter is it then, whether we pay it to-Day or to-Morrow? or whether it be by Want or Hunger, or by a Disease?

Nay, in Case we were sure to perish for want of Necessaries, unless we used some sinful Course to procure them, this is what we ought rather chearfully to suffer, than by any unwarrantable Means endeavour to decline: For thus to die, *i. e.* for want of such things as we cannot honestly obtain, but might in all probability procure by sinful and indirect Courses, is a Kind of Martyrdom; for it is laying down our Lives in Testimony of our Belief, that God is able to pay us well for our Loss, and that he will most certainly reward abundantly all those who are faithful and obedient to him even unto Death: Whereas on the contrary, to seek to prolong our Lives by the Commission of any Sin, and thereby provoking God's Displeasure against us, is to prefer the living comfortably a few Years here, before the endless Happiness of an immortal Life in Heaven.

But the Truth is, that they who are honestly industrious in their Business, and careful above all things to please God, have no Reason at all to fear that they shall ever be left destitute of Necessaries for this Life; nay, the very supposing or fearing this, is another thing that our *Saviour* plainly designed to prohibit in these Words. For, *There is nothing more clearly contrary to this Precept of our Lord; take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, on what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on, (I say, there is nothing more contrary to this) than such Carefulness and solicitude, as is grounded upon, and accompanied with, a Distrust of God's fatherly Care and Providence.*

And that such Thoughtfulness as this was particularly, and in an especial Manner, meant to be here forbidden by our *Saviour*, appears plainly from the Consideration of those Arguments and Motives, whereby he himself, both here in several Verses following the Text, and likewise in *St. Luke*, backs his Advice; most of which are taken from the Observation of the Divine Care, in making ample Provision for all his Creatures.

So that the plain Sense of this Precept, expounded with Analogy to those Reasons whereby in the following Verses it is enforced, is as if our *Saviour* had said; be not you so careful about the Things of this Life, as if the Care thereof rested wholly upon you; as if either you, of your selves, were able to procure them by your own Care and Industry alone, without God's Blessing; or as if God was not able, without your own Overcare and Thoughtfulness, to supply you with them.

7. Another sort of worldly Care intended to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in these Words; *take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body what ye shall put on;* is a Care extending it self to times too far off, to a farther Time yet to come, than it is any ways needful we should be at present much concerned about; there being Space sufficient, and (as we may reasonably hope) Opportunities enough, between this and then, to make Provision against it shall come.

And this seems to be more especially the Design of our *Saviour* in those Words which we meet with at the thirty fourth Verse of this Chapter; where our Lord concludes his whole Discourse upon this Subject thus; *take therefore no Thought for the Morrow, for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self.*

Where by *the Morrow*, we are not to understand strictly, just the very next Day after the present; as if we might not so much as think of one Day's Provision before-hand: For in the State we are now in, it is necessary, if we have Opportunity, to make some Provision for the future Time, because all needful Provision for this Life cannot be made at all Times: For if the Husbandman would have a Crop in Harvest, he must sow his Seed, the Winter, or at least the Spring before; and if he would be fed in the Winter, he must gather in his Corn in the Harvest, when it is ripe, and while the Weather serves for it, and before it rots upon the Ground, which the most part of it certainly will do, if he reaps and ins it no faster than he has present Occasion to use it.

Such Forecast and Providence as this therefore our *Saviour* cannot reasonably be thought to condemn; it being no more than we are elsewhere directed and commanded to use; particularly in *Prov. vi. 6. Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard, consider her Ways, and be wise, which provideth her Meat in the Summer, and gathereth her Food in the Harvest.*

By *the Morrow* therefore in that Place, we must understand such a future time, as is at such a remote Distance from the present, as that it is either unlikely that we should live to it; or if we should, it is more than probable, that by God's Blessing and our own Industry, we shall be able to make sufficient Provision against it, in the mean Season.

Not that even in that Case neither, it is our Duty, if we have an Opportunity now put into our Hands, which we may not have another time, wherein we may with greater Ease provide against all future Wants and Accidents, than it is reasonable to hope we shall ever be able to do at any time hereafter; not, I say, that it is our Duty in this Case, to neglect and let slip such an Opportunity. This certainly was not our *Saviour's* Meaning when he said, *take no Thought for To-morrow;* but what he meant was only to teach and declare, that if we have enough for the present, we ought not then to be very thoughtful before-hand, against such a future time as is at a great Distance from us; but that we ought then to rest satisfied; and to be well contented with such things as we have; trusting that the same Divine Goodness which has supplied our Wants hitherto, will go on to supply them, if we be not wanting to our selves: And that if we cannot make such good Provision for any nearer future Time as we could wish, without neglect of our present Duty, we ought in that Case to continue doing our Duty nevertheless, trusting and depending upon the Divine Blessing and Providence for our future Support, rather than suffer our Care for the future, even though it be but for the very next Day just before us, to hinder us from the Performance of those Duties of Religion, which are at present incumbent upon us.

Thus

Thus we are to take no Thought for To-morrow; (*i. e.* not for so much as one Day before us) unless we have spare Time enough to Day to do it in; *i. e.* unless we can do it consistently with that Care which we ought to take every Day, to fit our selves for another Life: Because whether we shall live so long as we have proposed to our selves, is uncertain; nay, whether we shall live one Day longer or no, we know not; but this we know certainly, that when once this Life is ended we shall enter immediately upon an everlasting State, of unspeakable Happiness or intolerable Torment.

Seeing therefore the time of our Life is uncertain, and we cannot tell, whether we shall have space enough left, both to lay in a Stock of worldly Goods against old Age, or for the time long before us, and also to secure our eternal Welfare in the other World, in case we should die sooner, as it is highly probable we shall; it is reasonable that this, being a Business of infinitely greater Concern to us than the other, should be taken Care of, as much as it can be, before the other. Doing thus, we may reasonably hope (trusting in the Divine Goodness and Providence) that we shall have time and leisure enough hereafter, to supply all our future worldly Wants. Whereas, on the other Side, be we ever so ill-provided with worldly Things, against To-morrow, or the future Time, yet if we suffer our secular Cares to engross all our present time, and purposely delay the Care of our Souls, till we are morally assured, that our Bodies are sufficiently provided for, we may justly fear the Doom of that rich Fool, spoken of in *Luke* xii. 20. who by proceeding in this preposterous Method, lost both his Soul and his Goods too, having that required of him before his Accounts were ready; *thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee*; and having those taken from him and given to another Owner, before ever he had begun to use them; *this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee*; and then, *whose shall all those Things be, which thou hast provided?* and so, says our Saviour, at the twenty first Verse of that Chapter, *is every one who layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

8. Lastly, our Care even for the Necessaries of this Life, *what we shall eat, and drink, and put on*, is then also inordinate and excessive, and such as was designed to be forbidden by our Saviour in these Words; when it is such a Care as is vexatious and troublesome to our selves; when our fear of future Want, and our solicitude to prevent it, does so take up, possess, and torment our Minds, as that we cannot with any Comfort use and enjoy what the kind Providence of God has already afforded us for our present Needs and Occasions; when our Thoughts are as troubled and perplexed, and our Carefulness for the future does as much vex and torment us, as if the Want, which we only fear, were actually present, and we had not a Meal's Meat to satisfy our present Hunger.

And this seems to be the Meaning of that Clause in *St. Luke*, immediately subjoined to that Precept parallel to the Text; *neither be ye of doubtful Mind*, or live not in careful Suspence; but is more plainly the Sense of the afore-cited Text at the last Verse of this Chapter; where one of the Reasons given why we should not be thoughtful against the Morrow, is, because *the Evil of the Day is sufficient for its self: Sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*; *i. e.* the Pain, and Trouble, and Vexation, which every Day brings along with it; so that we shall not need to anticipate our Misery, and to add the Evil of the future Time to the Evil of the present, which is of its self sufficient, and ever will be so.

And indeed what can be more unreasonable, than that our exceeding earnest Desire to prolong this temporal Life, should be a Means of shortning

it? And there is certainly nothing that does more consume and waste it, than anxious and vexatious Cares. Or what can be more absurd, than that our very Desire to render our Life easy by a plentiful Provision, should render it more vexatious and troublesome than it needs to be, or than even a slender Provision would make it? Is it not enough to be pinched when we are in Want, and to be uneasy when we are in Pain? why then should we want what we have? and by anticipating the Misery that we fear, feel it before it comes; and voluntarily bring it upon our selves by our Fears, when perhaps otherwise it never would have come at all?

And now, having shewn, that our *Saviour's* Design in this Place was not to prohibit all Care for such things as are needful for the Body; and having also shewn, what Care and Solitude about this present Life, and the necessary Means of supporting it, it is, that our *Saviour* designed to forbid in these Words; *take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body what ye shall put on*: I shall proceed, as I proposed, in the third and last Place, to shew the Sinfulness and Unreasonableness of such Care as is here forbidden, and to endeavour to dissuade from it. But this is what our *Saviour* himself has done in several Verses following the Text, on which therefore I purpose to discourse the next time.



DISCOURSE LXIII.

The Sinfulness of excessive Care.

MATTH. VI. 25, to 33.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on. Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?

Behold the Fowls of the Air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit unto his Stature?

And why take ye Thought for Raiment? Consider the Lillies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his Glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore if God so cloath the Grass of the Field, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven; shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little Faith?

Therefore take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these Things do the Gentiles seek). For your heavenly Father knoweth, that ye have Need of all these Things.



PON the former Part of the first of these eight Verses, I have heretofore discoursed in this Place; and taking Notice of the Connexion between them and those immediately foregoing at the twenty fourth Verse; *ye cannot serve God and Mammon: Therefore, I say unto you, Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or drink, or put on;* I observ'd from thence, that a Man may possibly be a *Servant* of *Mammon*, (that is, too covetous and worldly-minded) even altho' he seeks and labours only for such Things as are necessary for the comfortable Support of this Life: And consequently, that (since a Man can't be a *Servant* both of God and *Mammon*) there is a worldly Care, even for the Necessaries of Life, that is inconsistent with true Religion.

And yet on the other side, such is the general Lot of Men in this mortal Life, that unless they will work, they must starve; which Necessity is laid upon us by the divine Providence; and it is our Duty, to endeavour to keep our selves in Life as long as we can, if it were only that we may have the more Time to work out our Salvation in.

And therefore in discoursing upon those Words, I propos'd,

I. To enquire, whether all Care for this Life, and the necessary Means of supporting and maintaining it, was designed to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in those Words, *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.* And I have shew'd that it was not.

II. To shew, what Carefulness and Concern about these Things, even about the necessary Things of Life, is inordinate and excessive, and was most certainly intended to be forbidden by our *Saviour*, in those Words. And I have shew'd, that our Care, even though it be about the Necessaries of Life, is then inordinate and sinful; 1. when it is more than is needful; 2. when it is unseasonable; 3. when it is greater than those Things, or even Life it self do deserve. 4. when it hinders us from taking due Care of our spiritual Concerns; 5. when it betrays us to the Commission of any Sin; 6. when it is grounded upon, or accompanied with a Distrust of God's fatherly Goodness and Providence; 7. when it extends to Times too far off; and lastly, when it is such as is vexatious and troublesome to our selves.

III. The third and last Thing propounded was, to shew the Sinfulness and Unreasonableness of such Care for this Life, and the Necessaries thereof, as is there forbidden, and to endeavour to dissuade from it.

But this (as I told you) is what our *Saviour* himself has done, in that and the seven following Verses. So that in speaking to this Head, I should need to do nothing else, but only to explain and press those Arguments, whereby our *Saviour* himself has enforced his Prohibition of worldly Care.

This therefore is what I intend now to do; running over, as briefly as may be, those eight Verses which I have now read to you as my Text; and endeavouring to shew the Force and Strength of the several Arguments, whereby our *Saviour* here dissuades his Disciples from worldly Care. *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.*

I. And the first Argument that our *Saviour* here urges to dissuade us from an inordinate Care about this Life, and for Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, the necessary Means of supporting it, is in the latter part of the twenty fifth

fifth Verse; *Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?*

Here our Saviour calls upon us to consider, what God has done for us already; there being certainly no better Ground of Trust in the Goodness and Providence of God, than our former Experience of the same Goodness and Providence; especially, if we have already experienced it in a greater Matter than we are now to trust him for. And that's the Case here, *Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?* It is as if he had said; who was it that gave you that Life which you are so solicitous to preserve? was it not God? and who was it that created, framed, and fashion'd that Body, which you are so concerned to get Cloathing for? was it not God? what Reason then can you have to fear, that the same God, who has done this already, either cannot, or will not, supply you with Food and Raiment necessary to preserve that Life which he has given? you have, you can have, no Reason to fear this, unless you distrust either his Power or his Goodness. And the Consideration of what he has done for you already is abundantly sufficient to convince you, that there can be no Defect in either of these. For,

(1.) What he has done for you already is abundantly sufficient to satisfy you, that there can be no Defect of Power in God, to supply you with all Things necessary for the Preservation of Life. For to give Life is more than to preserve Life; to create a Body is a greater Thing than it is to uphold it; and to do a thing alone is a Token of greater Power, than to do the same thing with the Help and Concurrence of other Causes.

Forasmuch therefore as God has already, by his own single Power only, without any Help of others, nay, and even without your own Concurrence, created out of nothing that whole Substance of which you consist, forming then your Body out of the Earth, and enlivening the same with a spiritual and immortal Soul; it cannot be so difficult to preserve this Union between the Soul and Body, as it was to make it at first; nor to nourish your Body with Food proper for its Nourishment, as it was at first to form it; nor to cloath your Body with a Garment, as it was at first to cloath your Soul with a Body. It cannot be so difficult for him to preserve Life, as it was to give it; especially when he has prescribed you Means to use, which have a natural Efficacy to procure such things for your selves as are necessary to support and preserve you. He therefore, who has already done that which is more, cannot with any Reason be thought unable to do that which is less.

And if he can do it, there is no Ground to think, that he will not do it; for that is to suspect a Defect in the Goodness of God; which can with no more Reason be suspected than his want of Power. For,

(2.) *The Life is more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment.* We have already had Experience of the Goodness as well as of the Power of God; and that too when there was less Ground to expect it than there is now. For before he had made us, and while as yet we had no Being, it could not be said that we were the Objects of his Goodness; nothing could not be pitied or loved by him. But now that we are brought into Being by him, we are proper Objects of his Love and Goodness. For as the wise Hebrew argues; *thou lovest all the Things that are, and abhorrest nothing thou hast made; for never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it.* And, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works,* says the Psalmist, *Psal. cxlv. 9.* It may therefore now well be expected from his Goodness, that as he has made us, he will preserve us; because by his very Creation of us, he has contracted a Relation to us, whereby he is engaged to love us, and to do well to us; unless we forfeit his Kindness by our Misbehaviour. His former Goodness in

creating us, lays a Sort of Obligation upon him, to continue his Goodness to us, while we continue proper Objects of it. Having therefore been so kind to us already, as to bring us into a Being, which we had not before; it cannot be doubted, but that he will provide Means for our Continuance in Being, for so long as it shall be for his Glory and our Good.

This is our Saviour's first Argument to engage our Trust in God, for a Supply of such Things as are needful to us for this Life; taken from the Consideration of that Power and Goodness of God, which we have already had Experience of, in giving us Life, and in cloathing us with a Body. *The Life is more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment.*

His second Argument to this Purpose is in the twenty sixth Verse, in these Words, *Behold the Fowls of the Air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?*

Our Saviour had said before; *take no Thought for your Life.* And the two chief Necessaries of Life being Food and Raiment; Meat and Drink to support and sustain the Body against inward Decay, and Raiment to defend it against outward Hurt from the Injuries of Weather; he afterwards instances in both these; *take no Thought, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body what ye shall put on.* And his first enforcement of this Precept, of which I have now already spoken, was suited to both Parts of it: But this second respects chiefly the first Part of it; *take no Thought, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.*

And to enforce particularly that Part of the Precept, our Saviour here calls upon us, to consider the *Fowls of the Air*, and the Provision of Food that is made for them by the Divine Providence only: For, *they sow not* (says our Saviour,) *neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?* There is Argument in almost every Word of this whole Passage.

Behold the Fowls. Our Saviour might have brought greater Examples than this of God's Providence in preserving or providing Food for his Creatures. He might have produced the Example of *Moses*, preserved forty Days and forty Nights in Mount *Sinai*, without either Meat or Drink; or of *Elijah*, who, likely for a longer Time, was fed with Bread and Flesh brought to him duly every Morning and Evening by Ravens; and was afterwards supported by a poor Widow of *Sareptha*, who was enabled thereto by a prodigious Increase of a little Meal and Oil, which she had by her, not at first more than enough for one Meal's Meat; or of the *Israelites* in the barren Wildernels, who having there no Support from the Earth, had it from Heaven; and were fed with Bread from thence for forty Years together. But against these Examples it might have been objected; that these were plainly miraculous Preservations, and that Miracles are not ordinarily to be expected: It might also have been said, that these were Persons for whom God appears to have had extraordinary Kindnesses; so that consequently, from what he did for them, we cannot argue that he will do the like for us, who have no Reason to think our selves in such high Favour with him. Our Saviour therefore, waving these and all such like Instances, chuses rather to argue from the Observation of God's ordinary Providence, and that too in taking Care of Creatures of a meaner Species, of Creatures which are plainly of less Worth and Dignity than Man is; and consequently, not likely to be so much favoured or regarded by him. *Behold the Fowls.*

But even of the Fowls there are some, viz. those which we call *tame Fowls*, that are more immediately under the Care of Men, and could hardly live of themselves, without a Supply of Food from us; so that the Provision

Exod. xxxiv.
28.
1 Kings xvii.
6.

Exod. xvi. 35.

Exod. xvi. 35.

Provision of necessary Food that is made for them may be attributed, in some Measure, to the Care and Providence of Men, and is not such an evident Proof of a Divine Care and Providence. Our Saviour therefore, not mentioning these, but rather excluding them from his Argument, calls upon us to consider those Creatures that have nothing else to depend upon for a Supply of necessary Food, but only the Divine Providence: *Behold the Fowls of the Air.* And St. Luke, in his Relation of this same Argument, in *Luke xiii. 24.* mentions particularly the Ravens; consider, says he, *the Ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, &c.* Concerning which there is clear Intimation given, not only there, but in other Places of holy Scripture, that there is a more visible Hand of Providence in supplying them with Food, than other Creatures, or even than other Fowls of the Air. For thus, in *Job xxxviii. 41.* the Question is asked Job by God himself; *who provideth for the Raven his Food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of Meat.* And so in *Psal. cxlvii. 9.* among other Proofs of a Divine Providence, the Care that God takes to supply Food for the Ravens is particularly noted: *He giveth to the Beast his Food, and to the young Ravens that cry.* Of which the learned Dr. Hammond ^{Ham. Pract. Cat.} gives this Account; and I suppose what he says was not mere Conjecture, but well-grounded upon Observation. Naturalists, says he, ^{Ham. in loc.} have observed of the Raven, that it exposeth the young ones, as soon as they are hatched, leaves them meatless and fatherless, to struggle with Hunger as soon as they are gotten into the World: And whether by Dew from Heaven, a kind of Manna dropped into their Mouths when they gape, (and as the Psalmist says, call upon God) or whether by Flies flying into their Mouths, or whether by Worms bred in their Nests (as some think) or by what other Means, God knows; God feedeth them.

But without laying too much stress upon this Observation, which perhaps may not be strictly true; this is certainly true, (and it is true not only of the young Ravens, but of the old ones too; and it is true not only of the Ravens, but in general of all the Fowls of Heaven) that they live without Care and Solitude; and also without that provident Fore-cast, which is observable in some other Creatures; particularly in the Ant and Bee, which in the Warmth and Plenty of Summer lay up a Stock of Provision against the Cold and Scarcity of Winter; and yet these Fowls of the Air are fed as well as they. *The Eyes of all wait upon God, and he giveth them their Meat in due Season: He openeth his Hand, as the Psalmist speaks, and* ^{Psal. cxlv. 15, 16.} *filleteth all things living with Plenteousness.* Even these Creatures, the Fowls of the Air, which think not a Day before-hand, are as certainly, and as amply, provided for by God's Providence, as those which take the most Pains, and seem to have the most Thought about it.

And, are not ye, says our Saviour, *much better than they?* Certainly then, if God takes such Care of the inferior Creatures, which seem to be made only for the Use and Service of Men; he does take much more Care of us, whom he hath made little lower than the Angels, whom he hath crowned with Glory and Honour; whom he hath made to have Dominion over the Works of his Hands, and under whose Feet he hath put all things in Subjection; all Sheep and Oxen, yea and the Beasts of the Field, the Fowls of the Air, and the Fish of the Sea, and whatsoever passeth thro' the Paths of the Seas; as the Psalmist speaks, *Psal. viii. 3, &c.*

If therefore God provideth for the Fowls; if not so much as a Sparrow falls to the Ground without God, as our Saviour says, *Matth. x. 29.* much less can it be supposed, that any Man does ever die or perish for want of Necessaries, through any Defect or Oversight of the Divine Providence. He that provides so well for the lowest and meanest of his Creatures, will certainly

certainly provide much rather for the most noble and most excellent of all those Creatures which he has placed upon this Earth; and he that can supply them with all things needful, can as well, nay, I may say more, can better and more easily supply us.

For this is what seems to be farther intimated in that Clause, where our *Saviour* observes concerning the Fowls of the Air, that they do *neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into Barns*; that is, that they contribute nothing at all towards their own Support. They are indeed endued with a natural Instinct, whereby they seem to know what is proper for their Food, and whither to go for it, when they need it; but they have no Thought about providing it before-hand; they take no Care to get it ready for themselves against they want it. But this now is what we may do; nay, this is what, if we have Opportunity, we ought to do. We may till and cultivate the Earth, which of it self would bring forth only Briars, Thorns, and Weeds, and so put it into a Condition of bringing forth, by the Blessing of Heaven, Fruit fit for our Food. We may sow our Land in the proper Season, and when the Corn is grown ripe we may reap it, and lay it up in Barns or Store-houses for our Use. So that there is not ordinarily so much Miracle in that Provision which is made by Providence for those Men, who are honestly laborious and industrious in their Callings to get a Living, as there is in that which is made for the inferior Creatures.

And this renders our *Saviour's* Argument stronger still. *Are not ye much better than they?* For, if for those Creatures, which are worse, God is pleased to be as it were at the Expence of a Miracle for their Support, furnishing them as it were with his own Hand with all things needful; while they themselves sit still, are at no Pains, and take no Care about it: Much rather may it be reasonably presumed, that he will furnish us, who are more excellent Creatures, and consequently dearer to him, with all the same needful Things, if we do sow, and reap, and gather into Barns, as he means we should; when he may do this for us without a Miracle, in the ordinary Course of his Providence, by only granting his Blessing to our honest Labours, and giving good Success to those Means, which he himself has appointed, and commanded us to use to supply our selves.

But this Motive to engage us to trust in God for a Supply of such things as are needful to us for this Life, is yet farther strengthened by what our *Saviour* adds in the next Clause of the Words; they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into Barns, yet *your heavenly Father feedeth them*. He does not say, which in Sense would have been the same, *yet God feedeth them*; tho' that be true, for *God* and our *heavenly Father* are the same; and if the Argument had been so expressed, it would have been a very good one: But, I say, it is better and stronger by being expressed as it is here; *your heavenly Father feedeth them*. Our *Saviour's* here expressing God by a Phrase implying a nearer Relation, and that implying in it a stronger Affection to us than he has to other Creatures, makes it still more reasonable for us to trust, that since he takes such Care of *them*, to which he has not so near a Relation, to which consequently he cannot be supposed to be so kindly affected, as he is to us; he will not certainly leave, forsake, or disregard us. He will not, be sure, let us be unprovided for, when no other of his Creatures are left destitute: Especially, if we are diligent in the Use of those Means which he has appointed, and look up to him for a Blessing upon our honest Endeavours. He is *our Father*, he is not *theirs*; yet he takes Care for *them*; will he not rather be careful for *us*? He takes Care for *them* which are not his *Children*; will he not rather be careful for his *Children*?

Children? may not it reasonably be expected, that a Father should rather provide Food for his Children, than for others?

Especially, still, if he be their Father, not only by Creation, but likewise by Adoption? And that's our Case; whom he hath begotten again unto a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead; whom, of his special Grace, he hath called unto his Kingdom and Glory. 1 Pet. i. 3.

Having therefore received of God the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry *Abba, Father*; the Spirit it self also bearing Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God; and if Children, then Heirs; Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ: What Reason can we have to distrust his Goodness, or to make any Doubt of his fatherly Kindness to us in all Respects? He that designs us the highest Favours, will not, certainly, leave us destitute of necessary Provision. He that has prepared for us a Kingdom, will not, surely, deny us Bread. He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all Things? as the Apostle argues, *Rom. viii. 32.* Can it be supposed that a great King, who has Plenty of all Things, and makes abundant Provision for all his Household; who takes Care, not only of the meanest and unworthiest of his Servants, but also of his Beasts and Fowls, should yet suffer to starve, or to want needful Things, his Son and Heir, for whom he designs his Kingdom? And this is the very Case here: God is the Great King over all the Earth; all Things that are in the Earth are his; and the Care of his Providence extends to the vilest and worthiest of his Creatures; he giveth to the Beast his Food, and to the Ravens when they cry: Can it be supposed then that he will starve his Children? Can it be imagin'd that he will deny Means to prolong this temporal Life (so long as it shall be for their Good to have it prolong'd) to those, for whom, when this Life is over, he hath prepared a Kingdom, and Glory, and Immortality in the Heavens? *Your heavenly Father feedeth them, are not ye much better than they?* This is our Saviour's second Argument to engage us to a firm Trust and Dependence upon God, for the Supply of all our worldly Necessities, taken from the Consideration of his Care and Providence, in supplying, in a manner, miraculously the Wants of other Creatures, which are both of less Worth in themselves, and less dear to God than Men are. 1 Theff. ii. 12.
Rom. vii. 15.

3. Our Saviour's third Reason to enforce the foregoing Precept against Over-thoughtfulness for this Life, is in the next Words, at the twenty seventh Verse; *Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit unto his Stature?*

Here our Saviour dissuades us from anxious and distrustful Carefulness about the Things of this Life, by shewing the Vanity and Unprofitableness of such Care, by observing that it does no Good, that it signifies and avails nothing.

From whence therefore, by the way, it is evident, (as I have before observ'd) that our Saviour, in the foregoing Precept against Carefulness, did not mean to forbid honest Labour, or to command Carelessness, Sloth, and Idleness. For though anxious Care and Solitude contributes nothing at all towards our obtaining such Things as we want; yet Labour and Industry, with the Blessing of God thereupon, do contribute very much towards it. These are the Means which God himself has appointed us to use; and to which he rarely fails to give good Success. And therefore the Wise-man delivers it as a Proverb, *i.e.* he lays it down, as a generally acknowledged Truth, to which there are very few or no Exceptions, that *the Hand of the Diligent maketh rich, Prov. x. 4.* and that *the Soul of the Diligent shall be made fat, Prov. xiii. 4.* But then that this alone signifies nothing,

without the Concurrence of the divine Blessing, we are taught by the same *Wise-man*, Prov. x. 22. *The Blessing of the Lord it maketh rich; i.e. the Blessing of God upon our Diligence.*

And this also is what our *Saviour* teaches us in this Place: *Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit to his Stature?* As if he had said, To what purpose is it for you to weary your selves with Toil and Care? What will you be the better for all your Carking and Thoughtfulness? What will your vexing and disquieting your selves with anxious Solicitude about the Future profit you? Can you so much as add the least Measure to your Height by this Means? Nay, can you, by your Thoughtfulness, so much as make one single Hair to grow upon your Head; or, which seems less, to grow of what Colour you would have it? After all your Carking and Solicitude, will not these Things be just as God pleases? When you grew the fastest, which was in your Infancy and Childhood, you had then no Care nor Thought at all about it; but God gave you a Body as it pleased him; and made it to grow, without your thinking, to that Magnitude which he designed; since which Time it has not been, nor will it ever be, in your Power, to add a Hair's Breadth to your Stature.

If then ye be not able to do that Thing which is least, why take ye Thought for the rest? says our *Saviour*, completing the Argument, Luke xii. 26. *i. e. if you can't do the least Thing by your taking Thought about it, how can you hope to do that which is more?* After all therefore that you can do or contrive, you must at last depend upon God's Providence; without whose Blessing, all your Toil and Labour, and much more all your Thought and Carefulness, will be in vain: Your best way therefore, is to ease your selves of this unprofitable Trouble; to do your own Duty in your Place and Calling, and to be diligent in the Work which you have to do; and then with Quietness to leave the Issue to God: *To be careful for nothing; but to cast all your Care upon God, who careth for you; and in every thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, to let your Requests be made known unto him.*

1 Pet. v. 7.
Phil. iv. 6.

4. A fourth Argument urged by our *Saviour*, to dissuade us from anxious and solicitous Care about this Life, is in the twenty eighth, twenty ninth, and thirtieth Verses, in these Words; *And why take ye Thought for Raiment? consider the Lillies of the Field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so cloath the Grass of the Field, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven; shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little Faith?*

This Argument is of the same Kind with that which he had urged at the twenty sixth Verse; and is drawn from the same Topick: *Behold the Fowls of the Air; for they sow not, neither do they reap; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them; are not ye better than they?* They are both, I say, drawn from the Consideration of God's Care and Providence about Creatures of less Worth than Man is. Only, whereas this Argument, as urged at the twenty sixth Verse, respected chiefly the first Part of the foregoing Precept; *Take no Thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink;* as it is here urged, it respects chiefly the latter Part of that Precept; *nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on. Why take ye Thought for Raiment? Consider the Lillies of the Field, how they grow, &c.*

Our *Saviour* here calls upon us to consider the *Lillies of the Field*; that is, the Flowers which grow wild, and of themselves, rather than such as grow in Gardens; because it may be thought that the Labour and Skill of Man contributes somewhat to the Growth and Beauty of Garden-Flowers; but the

the Growth and Beauty of those Flowers which grow wild in the Fields, are merely the Products of Nature and Providence; as Man does not, to neither do they themselves any thing towards it. For so it follows;

Consider the Lillies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. Nevertheless, it can't be supposed, that our Saviour's Meaning in this Clause, more than in the former, *they neither sow nor reap*, was to command or encourage Idleness; or to condemn the Use of those Means which God has appointed us to use in order to the providing Necessaries for our selves: No; but his only Meaning was, to shew the exceeding Unreasonableness of our distrusting the Goodness and Providence of Almighty God: As if he who provides for other Creatures without any Labour or Care of theirs, could not as well (could not, I may say, more easily; that is, by a less miraculous Providence) supply us with all needful Things, by giving his Blessing to our honest Labours and Endeavours to procure these Things for our selves. *They neither toil nor spin*; and yet they are cloathed by God; what Reason then have we to fear that he will not also cloath us, who, according to his Appointment, do *toil and spin*? If he cloaths them without their Labour, much rather may we reasonably hope that he will also cloath us, by prospering to us the Work and Labour of our Hands. And especially, if without their Labour, he not only covers, but likewise adorns and beautifies *them*; much more may we reasonably trust, that he will, by succeeding our honest Endeavours, provide for us such Raiment as, if not fine, gay, and beautiful, yet shall, at least, be such as is necessary for us; such as will answer the End of Cloaths; such as shall be fit both for Warmth and Covering. And this is what I take to be imply'd in the next Clause of the Words; *they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of these.*

But the Consideration of this last Clause might be urged to a farther Purpose, were it not a Digression, *viz.* to reprove the Vanity of those Persons who affect Fineness and Gaiety of Apparel, unbecoming their Place and Condition: And especially of those who are proud of their fine Dress; and have a greater respect for themselves, as well as they look to be much more respected by others, when and because they are gaily cloathed.

For what is there in Fineness and Gaiety of Apparel that can reasonably be *much affected or desired*? What good End or Use of Cloaths does a fine Garment answer more than another that is more mean and ordinary would do? Does a Coat keep the Body e'er the warmer, because it is cut out according to the newest Mode? or does it cover it e'er the better, because it is of a gay, beautiful or fashionable Colour?

But be that as it will; (for I suppose there is no Hurt in any Person's wearing, or chusing to wear such Cloaths as are fine or fashionable; provided they be honestly paid for; if they are not above his Rank and Condition:) Yet what is there in Cloaths, to be *proud* of? for after all a Man's Care to dress and adorn himself, he can't be so gay and glorious as a Flower: *Even Solomon, in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of them.* And is it reasonable that a Man should be proud of that, wherein he is exceeded by a Flower of the Field?

With much more Reason might the Flower it self, (if that could think) be proud of its own Finery; which is native and inherent, and a Part of it self: With much more Reason, I say, might that be proud, which shines with its own Beauty, and is glorious in its own Colours. Whereas that Beauty, that Fineness, that Gaiety of Dress, which weak and silly People are apt to be proud of, and to value themselves upon, is none of their own; no Part of themselves; but is all borrow'd from the Beasts, or Birds, or Flowers, or from the Earth? They are not therefore the *Persons themselves* which are fine;

but all that can truly be said, is that the Wool, or the Hair of the Beast are fine; or that the Feathers of the Bird are wonderfully gay; or that the Dye and Colour of the Herb or Drug is extremely beautiful; or that the glistening of the Diamond, which was dug out of the Earth, is very glorious: But what's all this to the Persons that wear them? Take from them their borrowed Ornaments, and then they are no better than other Mortals; perhaps not so well to look upon, as those whom they, when they are dress'd up in their glorious Attire, do disdain to cast an Eye upon, or to change a Word with.

But I am sensible, as I said before, that this just Reproof of the Vanity and Pride of Apparel, however it may be otherwise seasonable, is a Digression from the main Subject which I was upon; and therefore will pursue it no farther: For the Design of our *Saviour* in this Place, in preferring the Beauty of a Flower before the finest Attire, before the Array of *Solomon*, in all his Glory, was plainly to shew the great Reason that we have to trust in God, who bestows such Ornaments even upon Flowers; that he will not, unless we be wanting to our selves, leave us destitute of such Raiment, as, whether it be fine or not, may be fit for our Use, and answer the true Ends of Cloaths, Warmth and Covering. For to this Purpose he applies the Observation in the following Words; *Wherefore, if God so cloath the Grass of the Field, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven, shall he not much more cloath you?*

Here again our *Saviour* argues, as he had done before at the twenty sixth Verse, from the greater Worth and Dignity of Mankind than of the other inferior Creatures. *Are not ye much better than they?* he had said before, when he had taken Notice of the Providence of God in supplying Meat to the Fowls of the Air: And having here taken farther Notice of the same Providence, in cloathing the Grass and the Flowers; he argues again from the same Topick, *shall he not much more cloath you?* The Reason of both is the same; that we are better, *i. e.* more excellent Creatures of God, than either Fowls, or Flowers; and that it may well be expected from a Being of infinite Wisdom, as God is, that he will not neglect Things that are of more Worth, while he takes such Care to provide suitably for Things that are of less Value.

Well then might our Lord say, (as he does at the Conclusion of that Verse) to those who can't be persuaded to put their Trust in God, when they have plainly such great and manifold Reason to trust him, *O ye of little Faith!* For had the Scripture said nothing to us of the Providence of God; had it given us no Assurance of his Kindness and Goodness to us; yet, as the *Apostle* observes, *Rom. i. 10. The invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World, are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* So that, if we see them not, we are *without Excuse*: And, if we do see and consider them; if we observe how the *Ravens*, and other *Fowls* are fed, and how the *Lillies* and *Flowers* of the Field are *cloathed* and *beautified*, by the divine Providence; if we consider how (as the *Psalmist* observes) *the Eyes of all do wait upon God; how he giveth them their Meat in due Season; how he openeth his Hand, and satisfieth the Desire of every living Thing;* we must be of *very little Faith* indeed, if we think, that in that ample Provision which he has made for all his other Creatures, he will overlook or neglect *us Men*, whom he has *made but little lower than the Angels*, whom he has *crowned with Glory and Honour; and under whose Feet he has put all Things in Subjection.* If after such plain Demonstrations, as we have every Day from our own Observation, of the Goodness and Bounty of Providence, we are still in any Doubt whether he can, or (if we are diligent in our own Duty) will, provide for us such Things

Pf. cxlv. 15, 16.

— viii. 5, 6, 7.

Things as are needful; it must not be, because we have not Reason enough to trust him, but because we are unreasonably incredulous and distrustful: *Shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little Faith?*

And now our Saviour having enforc'd his Dissuasive from solicitous and distrustful Care for the Things of this Life, by these four Arguments, which I have already explain'd; before he proceeds to add any more, repeats over again his former Advice, and almost in the same Words, at the thirty first Verse, *Therefore take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be cloathed?* Only here, from his Way of expressing himself, it appears yet more plainly than it did before, that the Design of our Lord, in this Prohibition of Care and Thought for the Body, was not to forbid honest Labour, or prudent Forecast and Providence; but only anxious and distrustful Solitude. Take no Thought, saying, *What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be cloathed?* These Words do very lively express the Passion and Concern that a Man is in, who has nothing to eat, and fears he shall have nothing, because he considers not the Power and Goodness of God. Both these Things therefore, (*i. e.* both the Power and Goodness of God) being plainly prov'd, from those Observations upon which our Saviour had grounded the Arguments against Care, which he had before insisted upon; he might well draw this Inference from the whole; *Therefore take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat, &c. i. e.* let not such Words as these, the natural Expressions of Distrust and Infidelity, ever come from your Mouth: Let not such a Thought as this ever enter into your Heart.

And then our Saviour adds farther, at the thirty second Verse, *For after all these Things do the Gentiles seek.* Which Words contain another; 5. A fifth Reason why we ought not to be overthoughtful for this Life, or distrustful of God's Providence. For in these Words it is implied, that tho' the Gentiles, who had nothing to build their Faith in God's Providence upon, but only their Observation of that plentiful Provision which Providence had made for all other Creatures, might perhaps be thought not so much to blame (and yet even they were to blame) if they were not thereby convinc'd of the Power, Goodness, and Providence of God; yet the Jews to whom our Saviour spake, who had the Writings of Moses and the Prophets, could not be excus'd upon that Account: And therefore we Christians, who are farther instructed by the preaching of Christ and his Apostles, shall be yet more inexcusable, if we are not fully establish'd in the Belief of those Truths, by the many plain Declarations and Examples of a powerful, wise and good Providence, which we meet with every where in the holy Scripture.

Or else the Argument may be thus taken: The Gentiles, who know nothing of another Life, are very solicitous to continue this Life as long as they can. And it is no Wonder that they are; because they have no Expectation beyond this Life: But you, to whom *Life and Immortality is brought to light by the Gospel*; you, who are taught that you are but *Pilgrims and Strangers upon Earth*; you, who look for another Country in Heaven, and are taught to esteem that your Home; you will be much more to blame, if you are concern'd and solicitous about this Life, in such a Manner as they are. You ought to consider that your Time here is but short; and that if you do but arrive safe to Heaven at last, where there is no Want of any Thing, nor Fear of future Want; it will be no great matter thro' what Scarcity, or Hardship, or Difficulty you get thither.

6. The sixth and last Reason urg'd here in the Text by our Saviour, to enforce his Dissuasive from worldly Care and Thoughtfulness, is in the latter Clause of the same Verse, in these Words; *for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have Need of all these Things.*

The foregoing Arguments, design'd to beget in us a firm Belief of God's Providence, and a sure Trust and Confidence therein, had been taken from the Consideration of God's Power and Goodness: But it may possibly be, that one that has Power enough to supply all our Wants, and Goodness enough to incline him to do so, should yet leave us unsupply'd, for want of knowing what our Wants are. He may think us not so destitute of Necessaries as we really are; or may believe us better able to supply our own Wants than we find our selves to be. And this, doubtless, is many Times the Reason why some poor People are almost suffered to starve, altho' there are many living near them, that have both Ability and Charity enough to supply their Needs. But the Case is, that the others do not know how much these Persons are in Need; and these are, it may be, too modest, or perhaps, too proud, to make known their low and needy Condition.

Here therefore our *Saviour* shews, that there is no more Defect of Knowledge in God, than there is of Power and Goodness; that as he is able and willing to provide Necessaries for us, so also he knows what Provision is necessary. He that made our Body, understands the Frame, Nature and Constitution of it; he knows that without a continual Supply of Meat, Drink, and other Necessaries, it can't subsist; and he knows likewise what Store, or what Scarcity of Provision we have already, and how far our own honest Labour will go towards the making a future Supply thereof.

Forasmuch therefore as God perfectly knows all these Things, and as he is our *Father*, bears us a kind Affection; and as he is our *heavenly Father*, is able to do for us what he pleases; there is plainly no Reason that we should ever distrust him. We need no better Assurance, that we shall never want any thing that is good and necessary for us (so long as we are not wanting in our own Duty, and honest Diligence) than this; that *our heavenly Father knoweth that we have Need of all these Things*.

But besides those Reasons and Enforcements of our Lord's Prohibition of anxious, distrustful, and immoderate Care, which I have now already explain'd; there seems to be another imply'd in the thirty third Verse, *Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness; and all these Things shall be added unto you*. And another still, in the thirty fourth Verse, *The Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; and sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*.

But as I did not propose to say any Thing of them at this Time, (they being without the Compass of my Text;) so neither, if I had, could I now have done it, without trespassing upon your Patience.



DISCOURSE LXIV.

Religion the chief Business of Life.

MATT. VI. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.



OUR Saviour had been endeavouring in the foregoing Verses, (on which I discoursed the last time) by many weighty Arguments, to take off his Disciples from too great Care and Thoughtfulness about the things of this Life, *what* they should eat, and drink, and put on; and in the Text directs them to another Object, on which to fix their Desire, and about which to exercise their Care and Concern; *viz. the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; the seeking after and labouring for which, as it is upon many Accounts more necessary and profitable than our worldly Care can be, (as I shall shew hereafter) so it will likewise (as our Saviour here says) render this other Care in a Manner needless; because to them who labour as they ought to do for the obtaining of the heavenly Riches, those earthly good Things which other Men spend their whole Life and Strength about, will be thrown in over and above: *Seek first, &c.*

Which Precept nevertheless we are not so to understand, as if our Saviour would have his Disciples altogether negligent about their worldly Concerns; for then it would contradict many other Texts of holy Scripture, wherein Diligence and Industry in our respective Callings is not only commended, as a likely Means of obtaining for our selves the Necessaries and Conveniences of this Life, but also commanded as a Point of necessary Duty, as one Part of that Condition, on the faithful Performance whereof our eternal Happiness does depend.

Besides, it is a Curse entailed upon the whole Race of Mankind, that *in the Sweat of their Brows they shall eat their Bread*: It is the Command of St. Paul to the *Thessalonians*, that *such as would not work should not eat*: And Solomon has told us, that as *the diligent Hand does make rich, so Drowsiness will cloath a Man with Rags*. Seeing therefore we are not now to expect that the Earth should bear Fruit fit for Food without Tillage, or that the

East.

East-Wind should bring up Quails, or that God should feed us (as once he did the *Israelites*, when they were in a barren Wilderness) with *Bread from Heaven*, it cannot be reasonable to understand our *Saviour's* Words here as if he intended to encourage his Disciples in Sloth and Carelessness.

And that he did not, is farther evident from the Text it self; for had he designed, either in the Text, or even in the foregoing Verses, by those Phrases, *Take no Thought for your Life*; and, *take no Thought what ye shall eat, or drink, or put on*; to forbid all Manner, and even the least Measure of worldly Care; he would not have said in the Text, *seek first the Kingdom of God*, or (as it is expressed in *St. Luke*) *seek ye rather the Kingdom of God*: By which Way of speaking he seems plainly to give us leave to seek for other things after this, and subordinately thereto: But he would rather have said, *seek ye nothing else but only the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*: It was not therefore, I say, our *Saviour's* Design, wholly to prohibit all worldly Care, but only to regulate and moderate it: And the Care for the Body and the things belonging to it, which he here condemns, is only such a Care as is irregular and exorbitant, such a Care as is inconsistent with, or does greatly hinder, the Care of our Souls, and such Provision as is necessary to be made for a future State. *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.*

In discoursing on which Words, I shall do these three Things.

I. I shall briefly explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoined; *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

II. I shall endeavour to persuade and enforce the Practice of this Duty, by some Considerations, shewing the Necessity and Reasonableness of it. And,

III. Lastly, I shall explain the Meaning, and endeavour to manifest the Truth of the Motive here urged by our *Saviour* himself to enforce it; *all these Things shall be added unto you.*

I. I shall briefly explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoined; *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

And this I shall do by enquiring,

1. What we are here to understand by the *Kingdom*, and what by the *Righteousness of God*.

2. What it is to seek them. And,

3. What it is to seek them first. *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

I. I shall enquire what we are here to understand by the *Kingdom*, and what by the *Righteousness of God*.

(1.) What is here meant by the *Kingdom of God*. And of this Phrase there are several Significations in holy Scripture; with the Mention of which I shall not need now to trouble you, because I think it is plain, that by the *Kingdom of God* in the Text, nothing can be so fairly and naturally understood, as the Glory and Happiness which God has prepared for good Men in another Life; seeing the seeking of this is here most plainly opposed to worldly Care, and preferred before it. Just as our *Saviour* himself exhorts in another Place, *Labour not for the Meat that perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*: And the *Apostle*, *Set your Affections on Things above, and not on Things of the Earth*. So here; *Take no Thought*, saying, *what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?* For after all these Things do the Gentiles seek; and your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these Things. But seek

ye first the Kingdom of God. After all those things do the Gentiles seek; i. e. they employ their Minds wholly about these worldly Matters; and they are somewhat excusable for so doing, who have no certain Knowledge of a future State: But seek ye first the Kingdom of God; i. e. ye, to whom Life and Immortality is brought to light by the Gospel, have Business of greater Concernment to mind; your Welfare to all Eternity deserves your Care and Consideration, much rather than the Maintenance of your present State: Seek ye therefore the Kingdom of God. It follows,

(2.) And his Righteousness. Which Words we cannot, I think, here understand in their proper Sense, for the personal and inherent Righteousness and Purity of God, because it cannot be conceived how that should be the Object of our Desire and Care: But we must understand thereby that Righteousness which is required of us; but which being wrought in us by the Spirit of God, though not without our own Co-operation, or which being such as God is graciously pleased to accept and reward, may therefore not improperly be called, the Righteousness of God.

So that the Difference, as I conceive, between the Kingdom and the Righteousness of God, which are both here proposed as the Objects of our Desire and Care, is this; that the first, viz. the Kingdom of God, is what we are to aim at as our End; the second, viz. the Righteousness of God, is what we are to endeavour after as the necessary Means, as the indispensable Condition of obtaining our End. The end is eternal Life and Happiness; the necessary Means or Condition is Righteousness; for without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord, Heb. xii. 14. and no unrighteous Person shall enter into the Kingdom of God, as we are told, 1 Cor. vi. 9.

And now from hence it will be easy to give an Account, what it is to seek these Things: Which was the second Thing to be enquired into.

2. For though the Word be but one, once spoken, but to be referred to both the Subjects here mentioned, seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness; yet it is plain it must be differently understood, when referred to the Kingdom of God, and when referred to the Righteousness of God; for that being (as was said before) the End, to seek the Kingdom of God is plainly to make that the Object of our Desire; and this being the Means of obtaining it, to seek the Righteousness of God, is to make this the Subject of our Endeavour. To seek the Kingdom of God is to aim at that as our chief End; and to seek his Righteousness, is carefully to practise that Righteousness, which God has required as the Condition of our obtaining it.

And this one Thing more may be observed farther, that when we are bid to seek these things, the Meaning is not, that we should desire them faintly, or pursue them carelessly; but we are commanded so to seek these Things, as we were before forbidden to seek other Things; as is most clearly evident from the parallel Texts in St. Luke's Gospel; where the very same Word is used with reference to both, μή ζητέτε τὸ φαγεῖν, Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, &c. ἀλλὰ ζητέτε, but seek ye the Kingdom of God, &c. Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, i. e. do not seek or endeavour after even the most necessary Things of Life, with Thoughtfulness and Solitude, with Trouble and Anxiety; but seek ye the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, i. e. be as thoughtful and solicitous about these Things as you can be; you cannot be too much concerned about them, you cannot seek them more earnestly than it is needful and reasonable you should do. And this leads me to the third Thing which I proposed to enquire into, viz.

3. What it is to seek them first. *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

And two Interpretations there are that may be given of this Word, both very agreeable to our Saviour's Design in this Place: For,

(1.) *Seek first the Kingdom of God*, may signify, seek it very early, in the Prime of your Life, in the Days of your Youth and Vigor, when you are young, healthy, and active, and fit for Business. Do not put off this necessary Work, this one thing necessary, to your old Age, and allot that Time only for God and his Service, when you think you shall be past serving the Devil, the World, and your own Lusts: But let your Care of this Business be timely and seasonable; and do not then first think of providing for your Soul (which ought to have been the first thing in your Thoughts) when your Body is just tumbling into the Grave.

And if we take the Words in this Sense, they contain very good and useful Advice, and such as is at all Times very seasonable; I am sure it is so in the Days wherein we live. For if we look abroad into the World, we cannot but observe that the greatest Part, even of Christians, do live and act quite otherwise than is here prescribed; spending for the most Part their Youth in Vanity and Pleasures, and their Manhood altogether in Carking for this Life, and hardly ever entertaining one serious Thought of Religion till they find themselves decaying; and when the evil Days are come upon them, wherein they can no longer relish those sensual Pleasures which they before delighted in, and are unfit for any other Business in this World, then perhaps, because they have nothing else to do, you may find them with a Bible and a Prayer-Book.

And yet, what has been now said, is not to be so understood, as if we could take sufficient Care for our Soul in one Day, or Week, or Year, so as that we need never trouble our Heads more about it afterwards, live we ever so long; for the Truth is, Religion is not the Work of a Day, or a Year, but of a whole Life; and it must be minded both to Day and to Morrow, and the next Day, and every Day while we live.

Neither yet on the other Side is it so to be understood, as if we might not at all in our younger Days spend any Time in seeking after such Things as are necessary for the Body, and the Preservation of this Life: For if we want necessary Provisions for our present Support, we must give to our secular Thoughts and Employments, so much of every Day, as is sufficient for the procuring those necessary Things for the Body which we stand in present need of; and this we must do, even although we have not as yet made such Proficiency in Religion, as we ought to have done for the time past, and much less as we hope we shall do if we live longer; we must, I say, notwithstanding this, nevertheless bestow some Time and Care in providing for the Body such Things as are necessary for its Support, though it be some present Hindrance to our other Care; because without this, that Time in which we are to work out our Salvation would fail us.

The Meaning therefore of this Precept, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*, if it be understood with reference to the Time of our Life, is this; that we ought to begin this Work very early, and to lose as little time from it as is possible; that be the Necessities of our Bodies ever so pressing and urgent, we ought not however to postpone the Care of our Souls till such time as our Bodies are sufficiently provided for, but should mind both together as well as we can. But this not being that Sense of the Words which I suppose our Saviour chiefly designed, I shall not insist farther on it. For,

(2.) When our Lord here bids us to *seek first the Kingdom of God*, I believe his Meaning was, that we should seek it more; *seek rather the Kingdom of God*; so it is expressed in *St. Luke*; *i. e.* that we should seek it with greater Concern and Earnestness than we are allowed to have about any thing in this World, even about our Life it self, and the necessary Means of supporting it: That whereas in the Pursuit of our worldly Interests we ought to be cool and calm, and content sometimes to meet with Disappointment and bad Success, we may, nay we ought to be as anxious and solicitous as ever we can, about this great and weighty Affair, lest we should unhappily miscarry in it, and so miss of that Happiness which we desire and aim at.

In short therefore, by these Words, *seek ye first the Kingdom of God*, as they are connected with the foregoing Words at the thirty first Verse, *Take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink?* &c. we are enjoined to be very careful for, and thoughtful about, our future State; to learn our Duty and to practise it, to acquaint our selves with the Will of God, and to order our Lives and Conversations according to it. The thing here commanded is to make Religion the chief Business of our Lives; *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the Glory of God*; to have an Eye to Heaven in every thing, and to make the obtaining eternal Happiness in the other World our main Design, which we should have always in our Mind; and then what time we can spare, we may lawfully enough employ in providing for the Body, and in procuring for our selves a competent Measure of the Necessaries and Conveniences of this Life. But still our Care about these Matters must always be subordinate to the other; and if we cannot get much of this World, without greater Care and Solitude than it deserves, or not without making Shipwreck of a good Conscience, and hazarding the Salvation of our Souls, we must sit down quietly, and rest contented without it.

This is the Duty here enjoined, if it be not improper to call that a Duty, which comprehends all our Duties, as this, you see plainly, does: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

But the great Difficulty of all lies, not in understanding what it is that we are here commanded, but in practising according to it. And yet, if we would but wisely consider Things, there would be no great Difficulty in that neither; for the very great Reasonableness of it would make it appear easy, and be sufficient to engage us to it, notwithstanding any Difficulties that we might meet with in it.

This therefore was what I proposed to do in the second Place, and come now to; *viz.*

II. To endeavour to persuade and enforce the Practice of this Duty, by some Considerations shewing the Necessity and Reasonableness of it. And here it may be considered,

1. That the Care which is here commanded of seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, that is, of studying to secure our everlasting Happiness in the other World, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this Life, is most absolutely necessary; whereas it is not so necessary that we should be careful and concerned about other Matters; so that it is highly reasonable that we should seek this *first*; *i. e.* be more careful and industrious about this, than about any other Business, seeing the greatest Care and Concern is no more than is necessary to fit us for Heaven, whereas a moderate Care is enough for this World. For this is most evidently a Rule of Prudence, to bestow on every thing so much Care as is needful, and no more; because if we be-

flow

flow less than is needful, we shall not attain our End; and if we bestow more, it will be bestowed unprofitably; and not only so, but may prove an Hindrance to us in some other Affair.

I say then, that the greatest Care and Concern is no more than what is needful to fit us for Heaven; whereas a less and a more moderate Care is sufficient for this Life; I mean for all the Necessaries and Conveniences of it, I do not mean for the Vanities, Superfluities, and Extravagancies of it. For he that *will be rich* at any Rate, whose Mind and Heart is set upon worldly Greatness, and who is resolved, if it be possible, to raise himself above the common Pitch: He, I say, that proposes these great things to himself, and will be contented with nothing less, must, it may be, be forced to use great Thoughtfulness, and much Pains to accomplish his Designs; but then, I say, that all such Thoughtfulness is unnecessary, because the End it self, which he aims at is so; seeing a Man might live as well, more at his Ease, and at least as much to his own Content and Satisfaction without such Things, as he can do with them, after all his Toils and Sweat to obtain them.

For what is any Man really the better or the happier for a great Multitude of Servants and Attendants? Is it not rather an Increase of, and an Addition to his Trouble, to have so many besides himself to look after, and to take Care of? or what real Benefit or Advantage does there accrue to any Man from the outward Respect that is paid him, being in an high Station, by those who perhaps inwardly hate and envy him, and heartily wish his Destruction? these are great things in Shew and Appearance, but they are very little in Substance and Reality. And so again; what great Matter is it, whether our Furniture be brought from the *Indies*, or was made at the next Village, if one be as useful and convenient as the other? or what real Advantage is it to any Man to have his Rooms adorned with Pictures drawn by the best Hands? will they cause him to sleep ever the sounder? will they cure the Head ach? will they prevent or remove any one Pain or evil Incident to our mortal Nature, or procure us so much as one Moment's Respite from the Grave? Now if they will do none of all these Things, I do not see why he who has them should be accounted a so much happier Man than he who has them not. And so for the Table; what does it signify whether it be spread with variety of Dainties, or furnished only with what is sufficient? for a Man can eat, but till he is satisfied; or if he does eat more, he'll be sick of it, and have Cause to repent; and what he leaves, be it much or little, was so much more than enough, and he had done as well every whit without it.

Let us then subtract these unnecessary Things, and see what remains; and we shall find, that nothing else but wholesome Food, and warm Raiment, and Protection from the Weather, is absolutely necessary, either for the Support or Comfort of Life. And that it is no very hard Matter to procure these Things, may appear from hence, because there are so very few without them; except such, I mean, as either by their Sin, or Imprudence, or Prodigality, do bring themselves into this Condition: And yet if we take in these too, how small and inconsiderable is the Number of those who perish for want of Necessaries? I am sure it is far less than theirs is, who die by having too much, whose Surfeiting and Intemperance hasten their End, and bring them to their Graves before their time.

But though it should be granted, that in the low and unhappy Circumstances that some Men are in, the Maintenance of this present Life does necessarily require much of their bodily Labour, yet however it requires but little of their Thoughtfulness and Concern: for these Things are perfectly distinct, the *Labour* of the *Hands*, and the *Anxiety* of the *Mind*;

for a Man may spend a good Portion of his Time, if Need be, in providing for this Life, and yet not be very thoughtful for it; and a Man may use all necessary and prudent Means of bettering his worldly Condition, and yet not be much concern'd or solicitous about the Event: Now it is this last only, *viz.* the Anxiety and Thoughtfulness of the Mind about the Things relating to this Life, which our *Saviour* design'd to prohibit in the foregoing Verses of this Chapter; and it is this only which is inconsistent with a due Care of the Soul, and a just Concern and Thoughtfulness about the Affairs of another Life.

Seeing then that so little Care, in comparison, is needful about these earthly Matters, why should we, to no purpose, spend it about them? Why should we not rather bestow it upon our spiritual Concerns, about which, as I said, the greatest Care we can take is no more than necessary?

For it is not an idle Wish, or a faint Endeavour, that will be sufficient to carry us to Heaven: The Kingdom of God, and that Righteousness which is the indispensable Condition of obtaining it, will not be attain'd, unless with great Earnestness and indefatigable Diligence we seek and strive for them. *The Kingdom of God, says our Saviour, suffereth Violence, and the Violent take it by Force.*

And therefore a good and holy Life is oftentimes in Scripture compar'd to running, wrestling, fighting, and such like Exercises, which require great Strength and Vigor, Constancy and Resolution, for their Performance. Thus in 1 Cor. ix. 24. *Know ye not, says the Apostle, that they which run in a Race, run all; but one receiveth the Prize. One, i. e.* one of a great many that strive and run for it; for the Race is tedious and difficult, and very few have Strength and Resolution enough to hold out to the End. *So run, therefore, says he, that ye may obtain.* And, ver. 26. speaking of himself, he says, *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the Air; but I keep under my Body, and bring it into Subjection.* And there are many more Texts of Scripture to the same Purpose; but that of our *Saviour* shall serve for all, in *Matth. vii. 14. Strive to enter in at the strait Gate; for strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.* Or, as the same Text is express'd in *St. Luke, Many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* In which Words it is plainly declared to us, that a godly Life, meant there by the *Gate* and *Way* to Heaven, is not such an easy Matter as many are apt to imagine it.

And that it is not so, will farther appear, if we consider a little the two main Branches of it, which are, *to depart from Evil, and to do Good.*

I. We must *depart from Evil.* And this alone is a Business that will cost us much Pains; the best of us all having a vast Catalogue of Sins to be repented of. Now we must first diligently sift and examine our selves, enquiring, as well as we can, how often we have sinned, and wherein we have transgressed, or fallen short of our Duty, before we can be duly sensible of, and truly sorrowful for, all our Sins; and they are so many, that even this alone can't be done in an Instant. But when this is done, when we know how sinful we are, the hardest Part of Repentance is still behind, *viz.* to forsake our Sins; to leave off those vicious Customs which we have liv'd in a great while; to forbear those wicked Practices to which our own corrupt Nature does strongly incline us, or which are by a long and uninterrupted Habit become in a manner natural to us; and not only to forbear them, but also to wean our Affections from our most beloved Lusts, and to hate and abhor those Things which we formerly delighted in. And yet neither is this all we have to do; for,

2. We must not only depart from Evil, but we must *do Good*: And here, if we consider how large our Duty is, and how many Things are to be learned and done by us; and that it is not the keeping of any one, or of some few of the Commandments very carefully, but an universal Obedience that is required of us; and consequently, how many Ways we may come short of our End, we shall plainly perceive, that the greatest Care and Watchfulness will be no more than is necessary.

Especially, if to what has been said, we also add, that we have many potent and subtle Adversaries, who do all they can to hinder us in, and to divert us from the Prosecution of our good Purposes. For, as St. Paul tells us, *Eph. vi. 12. We wrestle not against Flesh and Blood, i. e. not against them only, but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against spiritual Wickednesses in high Places.* And therefore we have Need, as he there advises, to *take unto us the whole Armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil Day, and having done all to stand.*

And accordingly we engaged at our Baptism, to *fight manfully under Christ's Banner, against the Flesh, the World, and the Devil*, three powerful and crafty Enemies, that are daily plotting our Ruin, and ever laying Snares to entrap us; against whom we must maintain a perpetual and constant War, because they will be always fighting and troubling us while we continue in this State of Trial; so that it is necessary for us, on the other side, to be always upon our Guard, and to strengthen and fortify ourselves as well as we can, lest at any Time, by Surprise or by open Assault, they should prevail against us, and overcome us: And for the Maintenance of this War, the earliest Preparations, and the most constant Care and Watchfulness, and the strongest Endeavours, are no more than is necessary.

And this which I have now said, I conceive might be sufficient to prove, that the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness must be sought after; that they will not be attained without much Care and Trouble; a little of which, in comparison, is enough for the Attainment of all Things necessary, or highly expedient for this Life.

But then it may be consider'd farther, that our Care for these earthly Things is not absolutely necessary till we want them, at least not till we are in a near Prospect of wanting them: But our spiritual Concerns, and the Affairs of another Life, must be minded beforehand; otherwise our Care will come too late, and do us no Good. *Take no Thought*, says our Saviour, in the Verse following the Text, *for to Morrow; for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self.* The Sense of which Words, if they be understood as speaking of worldly Care, is this, that our worldly Provision comes timely enough if we have it just when we need it; that our Food and our Raiment are not necessary, till we are hungry, or cold, or naked; that it is no Matter whether we have them in Store beforehand, if they do but come soon enough to satisfy our present Desires, and supply our present Wants. And accordingly, our Saviour has taught us to pray, not that our Barns may be full, and that we may always have Goods laid up for many Years, or even for many Days, before we shall have Occasion to use them; but only for Necessaries to supply the present Needs, and to answer the present Cravings of Nature; *Give us this Day, or Day by Day, our daily Bread; i. e. give it us as we want it; we desire no more; this is all that a good Christian is taught to request of God.*

And yet if we take a short View of the World, we may observe, that the generality even of Christians are employed, and that to the great Hazard of their Souls, upon a far different Account; not to get Meat for their Hunger, or Cloaths for their Nakedness, but to raise Families, and

to get a great Name in the World. *They walk in a vain Shadow,* as the *Psalmist* speaks, *and disquiet themselves in vain, in heaping up Riches, which they have no Foresight or Intention of ever enjoying themselves, and cannot tell who shall gather.* Their Labour is not for Necessaries, but for Superfluities; not that they may have a good deal to enjoy, but that they may leave a good deal behind them, and lay up Goods in Store for many Generations to come; neglecting in the mean time their Souls, which, for ought they know, may the very next Night be required of them. Like *Martha*, they are *careful and troubled about many Things*, which might as well be let alone, and which they will be little or nothing the better for; and are in the mean time very unmindful of, and careless about *the one Thing needful.*

And yet what has been now said, is not to be so understood as if all Care and Provision for the future, or even for Posterity, were to be found Fault with; for in this Matter we are directed in the holy Scripture it self, to take Example by the Ant, *Prov. vi. 6. Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard, consider her Ways and be wise, which provideth her Meat in the Summer, and gathereth her Food in the Harvest.* In imitation of which wise Creature, it is therefore a Piece of commendable Prudence, to lay hold on present Opportunities, and in Youth to provide against the Infirmities and Needs of Old-age: *i. e.* if a moderate Care be sufficient for it; for some Men have a great Advantage above others in this respect; and there is such Variety in Men's Parts, Educations, and Callings, that one Man may with greater Ease and less Anxiety get an Estate, than another can his daily Bread; so that, I say, if a Man's Circumstances and Opportunities be such, as that he can obtain a plentiful Portion of worldly good Things, without hazarding his Soul, or spending too much Time, and bestowing too much Care in the Pursuit of Wealth, to the neglect of other Matters of far greater Importance; this Advantage is to be esteemed a Blessing of God, which he may lawfully enough make use of, nay, which he cannot in Prudence pass by. But if a Man's Case be otherwise, then let him take Care only for to Day, and leave the Morrow to take Care of it self. For he is certainly a most notorious Fool, that spends his Days wholly in making Provision for this transitory Life; and much more, if he sends his own Soul to Hell, only that his Posterity may live at Ease, and wear fine Cloaths, and inherit Titles of Honour, without being at any Pains themselves to purchase them.

This Difference then, you see, there is between the Provision that is to be made for this Life, and for the next; it is not necessary that we should have any of these Things till we are to make use of them, and we can easily foresee when that will be; and if our Provision comes timely enough to answer our Needs, it is as well as if we had had it in Store many Years before-hand. But in the Provision for our Souls and against another Life, we must proceed in another Method, because we cannot tell how soon we may have Occasion to use that; so that we must do every Thing that can be done at present in order to it, and leave nothing to be done till to Morrow, which might have been done to Day, because we know not but one Day may be our last; and if, with the *foolish Virgins*, we ever suffer our *Lamps to go out*, it will be too late to think of *buying Oil* when the *Bridegroom is come*, which perhaps may be at that very instant.

Again; it may be considered farther, that as to these outward Things, the best and happiest Condition of Life consists in the moderate Enjoyment of them, and that a Man may have too much as well as too little of this World. It is indeed hard to say which Person of the two is the most wretched

wretched and miserable, the indigent and necessitous, or the great and wealthy; for ordinarily the Want of the one is not more troublesome than the Abundance of the other; the first is not more uneasy in his Hunger and Cold, than the other is in the Hurry and Noise which constantly attends him. Seeing therefore true Happiness, so far as any worldly Enjoyments contribute towards it, consists in the Mean between the two Extremes, why should any Man be laborious only to increase his Trouble and Sorrow, and to make his Life more vexatious and unpleasant? why should he sweat and toyl, when all the Fruit of it will be only to live afterwards more uneasy than he may do now? what can be more foolish, than for a Man to go on and lade himself with thick Clay, when the Burden of what he has already on his Back, is as great as he can well bear?

But we cannot labour too much for the heavenly Riches; a little Care will not, as I have already shewn, be sufficient; and the greatest we can take will be fully and plentifully rewarded; there being in Heaven *many Mansions*; i. e. different Degrees of Glory and Happiness in the other World; so that our greatest Endeavours shall not fail of a suitable and plentiful Reward; and the more Treasure we lay up now, the richer and the happier shall we be when we come to Heaven.

The Sum of what has been hitherto said is this: That seeing less Care and Concern is requisite for this World than for the next, and it is ordinarily an easier Matter to supply this Life with Necessaries, than to purchase a good Assurance of everlasting Happiness; and seeing, besides, these Things may be cared for and provided every Day, as we have Occasion for them, but the Affairs of our Soul must be minded before-hand, because we cannot tell how soon that may be required of us, and there is *no working in the Grave*; and seeing, lastly, we may labour too much for these Things, and the providing more of them than is needful, does, for the most Part, only increase our Trouble and Sorrow; but we cannot be too careful and solicitous about our future State, because the more we sow, the more we shall reap, and our Reward will be proportioned to the Sincerity and Earnestness of our Endeavours; it is highly reasonable, that we should seek *the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, in the first Place*, i. e. with the greatest Diligence and Concern; and these other Things only as it were by the by, and with due Subordination to that great Affair: For it is manifestly foolish, to bestow our greatest Care about such Things as need but a little of it, and to be, in the mean time, careless or unmindful of some other weightier Business, in the minding whereof all our Care and Labour would be well employed, and for which a little will not be sufficient.

But there are some other Considerations, whereby the Necessity and Reasonableness of seeking *first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, might be farther shewed; which having not Time to speak to now, I must defer the Mention of to another Opportunity.

†

DISCOURSE LXV.

Religion the chief Business of Life.

MATTH. VI. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.



HAVE already begun a Discourse on these Words, wherein I propos'd;

I. To explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoin'd.

II. To press the Practice of it by some Considerations, shewing the Necessity and Reasonableness of it. And,

III. To explain the Meaning, and to shew the Force of the Motive here adjoin'd; *all these Things shall be added unto you.*

I. To explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoin'd; *seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness.* And here I told you,

That by *the Kingdom of God*, in this Place, (for it has other Significations elsewhere) it is most reasonable to understand, that Kingdom in Heaven, which God has prepar'd for good Men; and consequently, by *his Righteousness*, that Purity of Life and Manners, which God has made the indispensable Condition of obtaining that Happiness.

And that when we are bid to *seek* these, the Meaning is, that we should aim at *that*, I mean the eternal Salvation of our Souls, as our End; and endeavour after *this*, viz. that Righteousness which is requir'd, as the necessary Means of attaining that End.

And, lastly, that when we are bid to *seek* these Things *first*, the Meaning is, that our Desire of that Happiness should be more ardent and passionate, than of any earthly Good whatever; and that we should seek it, and endeavour to obtain it, in the Way of Righteousness, with greater Earnestness and Solicitude than is allowable in the Pursuit of Honours, Riches, or Pleasures, or even of our necessary Food and Raiment.

In short, what we are enjoin'd in these Words is, to make Religion the chief Business of our Lives; to be careful, above all Things, to approve ourselves to God, by a good Life, and a holy Conversation; and to make our Care, even for the most necessary Things of this Life, subordinate to that as our principal Concern.

This is the Nature of the Duty here enjoin'd, if at least it be proper to call that a Duty which comprehends all our Duties, as this plainly does: For it is not, you see, a single Act of one Virtue only, that is here commanded, but an habitual Holiness and Virtue, or the constant and daily Practice of all our Duties to God, our Neighbour, and our selves. For it is only by a *patient Continuance in all well-doing*, that we do, or can, effectually *seek for this Glory, and Honour, and Immortality.*

II. The second Thing therefore, which I propos'd to do, was, to endeavour to persuade and enforce the Practice of the Duty here enjoin'd, by some Considerations, shewing how absolutely necessary, and how highly reasonable it is, that we should be thus more zealously and earnestly concern'd about our everlasting Salvation, and the necessary Means thereof, than about any Thing in this Life, or even Life it self.

And one very weighty Consideration I have already urg'd to this Purpose, *viz.* that the greatest Care we can take, is no more than is necessary for Heaven; whereas moderate Care is abundantly sufficient for this World; *i. e.* for all the Necessaries of it; and about Unnecessaries and Superfluities (which are oftentimes too rather Burthens than Conveniences) we need not be much concern'd. Now it is an approv'd Rule of Prudence, to bestow on every Thing that we take in hand, such Care as is needful or expedient, and no more; because if we bestow less than is needful, we shall fail of our End; and if we bestow more than is expedient, it will be needlessly bestow'd, and may prove an Hindrance to us in some other Affair.

I proceed now to press this Duty, by some other Considerations. And,

2. The Reasonableness of *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, will farther appear, if it be considered, that the chief End of our being sent into, and living in this World at all, was, that we might prepare our selves for another and a better State; so that if we make Religion our chief Business, we bestow our Endeavours upon that which is most suitable to our Nature and Faculties, and was design'd by God for our chief Employment; whereas on the contrary, we shall mightily mispend our Time, and mis-use our Faculties, which were given us for a more noble Purpose, if our chief or only Care be to support this Life, as long, and with as much Comfort as we can; which at the best is so full of Trouble and Misery, that it would not be worth taking any Care at all of, or endeavouring to prolong in the least, were it not in order to a better.

And what I have now said, has been the constant Opinion of all those wise Men who have compar'd our Life to a Way, a Journey, a Race, an Inn, and the like; plainly signifying by such Expressions, that our complete Happiness can't be attain'd in this State, but that something far more excellent is to be expected and sought for. For Men do not use to take up their Habitation in an Inn, or to undertake a troublesome Journey, without proposing to themselves some End of their Travel.

And this is no more than what the *Apostle* also has taught us, in *Heb. xiii. 4.* *Here have we no continuing City, but we seek one to come.* And, as he observes in the same *Epistle*, the wisest Men, even the *Ancient Patriarchs*, have said the same, *confessing, that they were Strangers and Pilgrims upon the Earth: And they that say such Things, declare plainly that they seek a Country, Heb. xi. 13, 14.*

And indeed, if we do but consider the Nature of Man, and the proper Use of those Powers and Faculties wherein he excels the inferior Creatures, we shall plainly see, that God has contriv'd, and consequently did design us

for some more excellent Purpose than he did them. We have Sense in common with the Beasts; and had we nothing better, our chief Happiness would consist, as theirs does, in enjoying the Pleasures of Sense: The greatest *Epicure* would then be the wisest and the happiest Man; and there could be no better Doctrine than that of the sensual *Atheist*, in the Book of *Wisdom*; *Come on, let us enjoy the good Things that are present, for this is our Portion, and our Lot is this.* Or had we been contrived only for a short Life here, they would not be much to blame, who say, *Let us eat and drink, for to Morrow we die.* But God has been more liberal towards us, and endued us with such Faculties, of which, in order to this Life, we can have but little Use; and given us a rational Soul, capable of, and naturally desirous of some other Happiness, than any it can meet with here: So that if he has not design'd us for some other End than purely to eat, and to drink, and to taste these bodily Delights, to what Purpose, may we well ask, do these Faculties serve? God may seem to us to have been too lavish of his Gifts, and to have bestow'd them where there was no Need. For, as far as we can judge, by the best Observations we can make, the Beasts do taste and smell, and use their other bodily Senses with as great Pleasure as we can; they also provide Meat for themselves, and maintain their Life as easily as we do, without any of that Reason that we are endued with; so that thus far, we are so far from being better than they, that they have plainly the Advantage of us; for the *Fowls of the Air*, which *neither sow nor reap*, are yet as well provided for with necessary Food, without their Labour, as we are with it: And the *Lillies of the Field*, which *neither toil nor spin*, are yet (as our *Saviour* observes) *arrayed far better than Solomon in all his Glory*; so that in this respect their Lot is better than ours.

Nay, if we consider farther, how much Trouble and Sorrow we do ordinarily endure in this present Life, which the Birds and Beasts taste nothing of; and that merely by means of that Reason wherein we excel them, (for 'tis only as rational and thinking Creatures, that we disquiet our selves with the Fear of Evil before it comes, and anticipate our Misery; whereas they can suffer only those Evils which are present upon them; considering this, I say) we might, if there were no other Happiness to be expected, even with our selves Brutes; we should have some Reason to envy their Happiness above our own, and might say of our selves, and of all Mankind, what the *Apostle* says of the *Primitive Christians*, in the Times of Persecution, varying the Phrase but a little, that *if in this Life only we had Hope, we were of all Creatures most miserable.*

But Thanks be to God, we have Hope beyond this Life; for it can't be conceived, that God who has so richly furnish'd us with Abilities, Powers and Capacities above our Fellow Creatures, could intend that our Employment should be the same with theirs, only to provide for, and maintain this Life; or that our Happiness should be no other than theirs, only in the Pleasures of the Body; for which Purposes Sense alone would have done as well.

Seeing therefore, God has not provided for us any Happiness in this Life, suitable to our Nature, or adequate to our Desires and Capacities, we do plainly debase and degrade our Nature, if we suffer our chief Care to be spent in providing for this Life; we misuse our Faculties, and foolishly misemploy our Time, which were given us for better Purposes; if our chief Aim be to purchase the sensual Delights and Satisfaction of this World: And, lastly, seeing there is a better and more solid Happiness design'd for us, than any we can attain to here, it is highly reasonable, that despising these lower Pleasures of Sense, we should aspire and endeavour

vour

your after that, and make it our chief Concern, by Piety and Virtue to seek that Kingdom which is above, *where only true Joys are to be found.*

3. It may be farther considered, that the Care and Labour that we employ in seeking the *Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, will bring us in more Profit, and turn to better Account, than our worldly Care can do: The Kingdom of God, which is the End we aim at, being infinitely more worth our Labour and Concern, than any thing that this World can afford: For, by the Kingdom of God, as I said before, we are to understand the eternal Salvation of our Souls; whereas all our worldly Care tends only to provide for the Ease of our Bodies, and the Comfort of this short and momentary Life: So that it is plainly highly reasonable to make that our chief Care and Concern, upon these two Accounts; (1.) because by that we provide for our *Soul*, whereas by our earthly Care we only provide for the *Body*: And, (2.) because this serves only to provide for a *short and uncertain Life*; that for an *eternal State*.

(1.) I say, by seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, we provide for our *Soul*, whereas by our earthly Care we only provide for the *Body*; and therefore there is good Reason that we should make that our chief Business and Concern: For if the Soul be of greater Worth and Dignity than the Body, it is plainly reasonable that we should bestow more Care about that than about this. For it is manifestly a piece of Prudence, to proportion our Care and Concern about any thing to the Worth and Value of it; and on the other Side, to be hugely concerned and solicitous about Trifles, neglecting in the mean time, or carelessly pursuing Matters of greater Moment, is a most notorious Instance of Folly. And in our temporal Affairs we use to go by this Rule, prizing and esteeming Things that are of Worth and great Use; and in Comparison with them, neglecting such Things as we think more useless, or of less Value.

Now the Soul does certainly deserve our greatest Care and Concern, far greater than any Thing else, because the Soul is indeed the Man himself; and we speak improperly, when we say, that the Soul and Body make up a Man; for in Truth the Soul only is the whole Man: For it is the Soul only, that thinks, and reasons, and that perceives either Pain or Pleasure; and the Body is only the Instrument by which it exerts its Operations, or receives Notice of Things from without. While the Soul lives, the Man is alive, though the Body he once had should be dead and turned to Earth: The Soul is the rational, nay, and the sensitive Being too, which apprehends, perceives, and judges Things; and the Body, though it be more nearly related to him than any Thing else, yet is still something without him, only an Instrument that the Soul makes use of, a Place where she is forced for some Time to dwell, but can scarcely be more properly said to be a Part of the Man, than an Instrument might be said to be a Part of the Musician, or an House a Part of the Inhabitant. For when the Soul is parted from the Body by Death, though it will not perhaps be able then to perform all those Actions which it does now by the Help of the Body, it will nevertheless still continue to be a rational, sensitive, and active Being. Nay, when our Souls shall be freed from this Lump of Clay, we hope we shall be, in some respects, more perfect than we are now in this State of Conjunction, and more able to exercise our spiritual, intellectual, and manly Faculties, to which this heavy lumpish Body is rather an Hindrance than an Help.

So that when I say, that by seeking the Kingdom of God we provide for our Souls, and by our earthly Care only for our Bodies, it is all one as if I had said, That by that we take Care of *our selves*, and seek our *own Happiness* and Welfare; or, as *Solomon* speaks, we are wise

for our selves, which he says is the truest Wisdom, *Prov. ix. 12. If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thy self*: Whereas by our worldly Care, we only make Provision for something without us, wherein we are not so much concern'd. By that we make our Souls, *i. e.* our selves, who now live in Houses of Clay, whose Habitation is in the Dust, meet Inhabitants for more glorified Bodies, and for the heavenly Jerusalem, the City that is above, in which no unclean Thing can dwell: But all that we do by our earthly Care, is only to make this present Habitation, wherein we now dwell, a little more pleasant and delightful. All our present Care and Labour serves only to beautify and adorn an old tottering Clay Building, which yet will in spite of all our Care, in a very few Years, crumble and moulder into Dust; and if our Care reaches no farther, what shall we do when this House fails us? is it not plainly more reasonable, and infinitely more worth our Pains, while we live in this earthly Tabernacle, to provide for our selves a better Habitation against the Time that we must leave this, than to spend our chief Pains and Care in repairing, beautifying, and furnishing this, which we must soon part with? And this leads me to the other Reason that I mentioned, why the Kingdom of God deserves more to be sought after than any earthly Thing, *viz.*

2. Because by seeking that, we provide for an *eternal State*; whereas all our worldly Care is spent about such Things as are but of very short and uncertain Continuance. For the Riches, the Honours, and the Pleasures of this World are subject to a thousand Casualties; or if they should escape, yet we can enjoy them no longer than while we live here; when we die, all that we have perishes with us, and we can no more taste any Pleasure, or reap any Advantage from all the Labour that we took under the Sun; for he that has the greatest Share of worldly Goods, cannot carry the least Parcel of them with him into the other World; but *as he came forth out of his Mother's Womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his Labour, which he may carry away in his Hand.* And this also, says the wise Man, is a sore Evil, that in all Points as he came so shall he go, and what Profit hath he that hath laboured for the Wind? For the Wind indeed; for Things so fickle and uncertain, and at the best of so short a Continuance as a Man's Life: For what is our Life? It is, as St. James says, *but a Vapour, which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away?* The Days of our Age, as the Psalmist speaks, *are threescore Years and ten; and if by reason of Strength they be fourscore Years, yet is their Strength but Labour and Sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we flee away.* And besides, if we should reach to this (as we foolishly call it) *great Age*, we should, it is likely, then be past tasting the Delights and Pleasures of this World; *I am this Day fourscore Years old*, said Barzilai to King David, *2 Sam. xix. 35. and can I discern between Good and Evil? can thy Servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the Voice of singing Men and singing Women?* And yet this is too great an Age for any Man reasonably to hope for: For if we consider how very few there are that die of pure old Age, in comparison with the far greater Number that are snatched away by a violent or untimely Death, it must be an unreasonable Expectation in any Man to trust that he shall be one of that small Number. And yet, if he was sure of this, and also of retaining his Senses to the very last, yet what are fourscore, nay, what are a thousand Years, if compared to an eternal Duration? they are not so much to it as one Drop of Water to the Sea, or one single smallest Dust to the Bulk of the whole Earth.

Seeing then by seeking the Kingdom of God we take Care for our *Souls*, whereas all our earthly Care only provides for the *Body*; and especially, seeing that tends to make our Souls, yea and Bodies too, everlastingly happy, whereas this can at most procure only the short and fading Pleasures of one Moment; let us not be so foolish, as to prefer Tin before Gold, or a Piece of Dirt, (our Body is no more) before our precious Soul, which is more worth than the whole World: Let us not be such notorious Prodigals, as for one small Mite in present Possession, to forfeit our Right to the Reversion of such a fair and durable Estate as is reserved in Heaven for us, if we will be at the Pains to seek for it.

4. Lastly, another Consideration which may shew farther, how highly reasonable it is to seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, is this; that if we make those the chief Objects of our Desire and Endeavour, we shall certainly reap the Fruit of our Labour to our abundant Satisfaction; whereas all the Care and Pains that we can bestow on worldly Matters, may be, and is very often, perfectly vain and to no Purpose.

Now our Labour for any Thing is then in vain, either when, notwithstanding all our Pains, we miss of gaining what we laboured for; or else, when those things which we spend our Pains about, though obtained, do not yield us that Content and Satisfaction which we expect from them. And then, on the other Side, our Labour is to good Purpose, when it procures what we sought for by it; and when what we sought for proves in the Possession and Enjoyment, as great a Good as it before appeared to be, and no ways deceives our Expectation concerning it. In both which respects we shall find it true, that the Pains and Care, which we bestow in seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, cannot but be to good purpose; and that all our worldly Care and Labour is most commonly, if not always, in vain.

(1.) If we consider the Uncertainty of gaining what we labour for, by Reason of the Insufficiency of our best Endeavours, either to get, or to keep Possession of the good Things of this World.

For, first, there is hardly ever any thing in this World to be got without venturing; and it often happens, that he who ventures out his Stock in Hope to increase it, never sees again so much as he ventured out.

Again: Pains and Industry are not the only Things requisite to make us thrive and flourish in the World, but it depends upon many other Things, which after all our Care may fail us, or in which after our utmost Caution we may be deceived; as the Honesty and Sufficiency of those we deal with, the Fidelity of Servants, the Peaceableness of Neighbours, a healthful and active Constitution of Body, and a Soul able to understand and manage Business; these are Things altogether as necessary to our thriving, as any Care or Labour of our own; and yet these are Things either not at all, or very little in our Power.

And when all these Things, and whatever else is requisite, have met together, and we are set into a fair Way of growing rich, how easily may all our Hopes be dashed on a sudden? how many things are there, beyond our Skill to foresee, or our Power to prevent, which may in a Moment put us backwarder than when we began at first; as the Malice of Enemies, the Treachery of Friends, a civil War, or a foreign Invasion, the Violence of Robbers, or an accidental Fire? Any of these, (and many such ill Accidents there are) will be sufficient to defeat our Hopes and spoil our Designs of growing rich.

And then besides (which indeed is chiefly to be considered and regarded) all our Thoughtfulness and Solitude signify nothing, towards the gaining

gaining the Riches or Honours, or other good Things of this Life, unless the Blessing of God be with us; for these Things are wholly at his Disposal, and he gives them to whom he pleases; and, *except the Lord build the House, their Labour is but lost that build it*; without this, it is in vain that Men rise up early, and take Rest late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness: And though Labour be the ordinary and natural Means of acquiring these Things, and the *diligent Hand does usually make rich*; yet, as *the Race is not always to the swift, nor the Battle to the strong*, so God who dispenses these Things as he pleases, has no where promised that he will always bestow them on those that take most Pains for them; and if he be not pleased to give them, all our Labour for them must needs be in vain: *Which of you, says our Saviour, can, by taking Thought, add one Cubit to his Stature? If ye then be not able to do those Things which are least, why take ye Thought for the rest?* Luke xii. 26.

The Husbandman may toil and drudge, he may take care to plow his Land, and to sow his Seed in due Season; but when he has done this, he has done all he can do, he has no more Power left; and if the Earth be barren or cursed of God, or if the Heavens give no Rain, or pour out in too great a Measure, he cannot by his own Skill and Power only, make so much as one Stalk to grow up and bring forth Fruit; and then what does he reap from all his Care and Pains, but Sorrow and Disappointment?

And so, though the Merchant may lade his Ship with such Goods as are likely to bring him in a profitable Return; yet this is all he can do; for it is not in his Power to hinder the Winds from blowing, or the Seas from raging; he is not able, by all his Prudence and Foresight, to secure his Goods from Storm and Tempest, Pirates and Shipwreck, and such like Accidents.

Or if his Ship should come home safe, and he should sell his Wares to good Advantage, and begin to say to his Soul, with the rich Man in the Gospel, *Soul, take now thine Ease, thou hast Goods laid up for many Years*; yet he can be no more sure of keeping one Moment by his own Providence only, than he was before of getting his Wealth; for there are a thousand Casualties to which it is obnoxious, which he has no more Power to prevent or avoid, than he had before to make the Winds and Seas obedient to his Command. All his Treasure, when hoarded up, as he thinks, most safely, is liable either to be spoil'd or taken from him; a *Moth or Rust* may corrupt it, or a *Thief* may break through and steal it; or else his Riches may (as Solomon says they sometimes do) *make themselves Wings, and flee away, as an Eagle towards Heaven, i. e. dwindle away, and consume, and come to nothing, no Body knows how.*

Thus you see how uncertain all worldly Goods are in their Acquisition; how incompetent and insufficient our Care and Industry alone is, either to procure or keep them; in which respect therefore our Labour for them may easily happen to prove in vain. Let us now, in the second Place, suppose that the Man gets what he desired, and keeps Possession of it to the last Minute of his Life; yet, I say,

(2.) It is great odds, that he will not meet with that Pleasure and Satisfaction, in the Possession and Enjoyment of what he took such Pains for, which he expected to reap from it; and consequently in this respect his Labour may be in vain too, he may have laboured for the *Wind*.

For, first of all, it is a great Chance (it seldom happens otherwise) if his Desires do not encrease with his Riches; in which Case he will be able to take no Pleasure in what he has already, because he will be coveting after, and labouring for more; but as a Dog (it is Seneca's Comparison) when he

has stood a good while gaping, and expecting from his Master a bit of Meat, swallows it down whole without so much as tasting it, and immediately opens his Mouth for another; so will he swallow down, without any Pleasure, whatever Fortune has already thrown to him, and being big with Expectation of more, will scarcely be able to taste the Sweetness of what he has already.

And that it should be so, I mean that his Desires should increase, rather than be asswaged, by what he gets, is no unreasonable Supposition, though in it self it might seem so; because daily Observation affords us so many Examples of it. Indeed there is not any Thing that has been more commonly noted by all than this; that the richer and the older Men grow, *i. e.* the more they have already, and the less they can want or have Occasion for, the more desirous they generally are to increase their Store.

Eo majora cupimus, quo majora venerunt. Sen.

Nay, that it should be thus, though it be very unreasonable, is not yet very wonderful; because Contentment is a virtuous Disposition of the Mind, which whoso has, will be satisfied with a little as well as with a great deal; and whoso has not, in a mean and low Estate, cannot, by only bettering his Estate, attain to; for still his Mind may be the same; and if it be, he will be still coveting what he has not.

Ambitio non patitur quendam in eam mensuram honorum conquiescere, quæ quondam ejus fuit impudens votum. Sen. de Vit. Beat. C. 27.

There are indeed no Bounds to be set to his Appetites, who measures not his Wants by the Necessities and Conveniences of Nature, but by Fancy and Humour; but such an one, after all his Gain and Purchase, will find something that he wants still, because he will want every Thing that comes into his Head, that he has not, and he will not have every Thing that he can think of; so that when he is arrived to such a Fortune, as he could not once, without great Vanity, have ever so much as hoped for, or proposed to himself, he will still want another Servant, or another House, or another pleasant Garden; his Neighbour's House or Farm will seem to stand in his Way, or *Naboth's Vineyard* will be placed conveniently for his Use; and if he thinks so, he will, like *Ahab*, be able neither to eat, nor sleep, nor take any Rest, till he has purchas'd it.

The greatest Kings, if of a craving and coveting Temper, are still seeking to add new Kingdoms to their Dominions; and I suppose you may have heard it reported of *Alexander the Great*, that when he had conquer'd almost all that he knew of this World, he wept because there were no more Worlds for him to conquer.

Indeed all the Difference between a poor and a rich Man, both of the like craving Temper, lies in this, that the first thinks he should have enough and be satisfied, if he had but a single House, and small Spot of Land, which he could call his own; whereas the other stands in great need of a Lordship, or a Kingdom.

But farther: If the Man we are now speaking of, who is so solicitous about this World, be supposed to have attained all that ever he proposed to himself; and that being resolved to stop here, he is really so constant to his Purpose, as not to trouble his Head, or disquiet his Rest by endeavouring to get more; yet he will find so little Satisfaction in the Enjoyment of this great Estate, that it will no ways answer the Pains he was at to acquire it. For these worldly and sensual Pleasures, which are all he can reap from it, are the Pleasures of the *Beast*, and not of the *Man*; they are not such as will satisfy a spiritual and rational Soul; but that will still be desirous of some other Happiness, which it will not be able to find in these Enjoyments.

Besides, what is it that the Man will have got for himself, after this great Augmentation of his Estate, which he had not before? I say, *for himself*; and they that are so solicitous about the World, seldom are so with a Design to do Good to others. What then, I say, is *he himself* really the better for

all this? For though he has a great deal, he himself can use but a little; he can eat and drink no more than he did formerly; or if he does, it will be Pain and a Disease to him; and though he has many Changes of Raiment, he can wear but one at once; and the rest, while they lie by him, will do him no Good. So that upon a just Computation of what he has gained, it will be found that almost all that he has laboured so much for, is (what he, good Man, never intended) to feed and cloath other People. So true is that of all rich Men, which *Seneca* says of *Curius Lentulus*; *Divitiarum maximum Exemplum, quater millies Sestertium suum vidit; propriè dixi, nihil enim amplius quam vidit*: Which I cannot translate better than in those Words of the *Wise-Man*, Eccles. v. 11. *When Goods increase they are increased that eat them; and what Good is there to the Owners thereof, save the beholding them with their Eyes? The beholding them with their Eyes*: This, he says, (and he could not but well know what he said) is all the Fruit that the great Purchasers of Riches reap to themselves. A very poor and sorry Reward for the Diligence and Care that they bestowed in seeking them.

De Benef. 2. 27.

Nay farther, if rich Men, as they have better Means of procuring whatever can pleasure them in this World, had also their Capacities enlarg'd, and were capable of receiving more worldly Pleasures than others; yet still it is to be considered, that all the Pleasures of Sense are, at the best, exceeding mean and low; and always mixed with some Pain or Disquiet, going before or following them, by which they are very much allayed and lessened. For besides the Trouble of getting an Estate, and the constant Care that attends the keeping it, even those bodily Pleasures, which are the only Benefit Men reap by it, have always some Pain going before them, or leave a Sting behind them. For the Pleasure that we take in all worldly Enjoyments, consists chiefly in the easing or removing some present Pain; Hunger and Thirst, and the Craving of our carnal Appetites, giving them a Relish, and making them delightful to us, which otherwise would be flat and insipid; and yet as soon as ever the Pleasure is over, *i. e.* the Pain, suppose of Hunger and Thirst, are remov'd, (in the removing whereof the chief Pleasure of eating and drinking does consist) we are very often no better, sometimes we are in worse Pain than before; an aching Head, or a sick Stomach, or some Uneasiness or other, commonly soon following thereupon: And whereas the Pleasure was short, and soon over, the Pain that follows it is oftentimes more lasting.

But, lastly, admitting also that these Pleasures of Sense, the only Fruit that can be hop'd for from worldly Care, might be enjoy'd without any Mixture of Pain; yet ordinarily before a Man can attain to this State, his Life will be well nigh spent and worn out; and the Consideration of what a little Time he has left to enjoy the Fruit of a whole Life's Toil and Care, will be a very melancholick Reflection: And the Thoughts that he must be forc'd to part with so soon, what he has been so long labouring to get, will be sufficient to embitter all his Enjoyments, to be sure will hinder him from taking such pure and solid Delight therein, as he might otherwise be suppos'd to do. *O Death*, says the wise Son of *Sirach*, *how bitter is the Remembrance of thee, to a Man that liveth at Rest in his Possessions, that has nothing to vex him, and has Prosperity in all Things?* Indeed the more prosperous a Man's Condition is, the more unwilling he must needs be to alter it, the more bitter and doleful will the Consideration of parting with it be to him; and yet he will not be able to forbear often thinking of that which he is so much afraid of, even for that very Reason, *viz.* because he is so afraid of it.

From all that has been said, therefore, I hope it sufficiently appears, that he that makes it his chief Business to procure the good Things of this Life, is very likely to spend his Labour in vain; both because he may so easily fail

of getting them, and because they are so empty and unsatisfactory when he has them.

But the Case of those who *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is very different in both these respects; for they need not fear missing what they labour for; and they may be sure to find their greatest Expectations fully answered in the Possession thereof. *Blessed are they, says our Saviour, that hunger and thirst after Righteousness, for they shall be filled;* i. e. they shall be sure both to obtain what they pursue, and to be fully satisfied in the Acquisition.

Dr. Ham. in
loc.

(1.) They that make it their chief Care to seek after heavenly Things, need not fear missing that which they labour for; because God is faithful, who has promis'd that he will give eternal Life to them, who by patient Continuance in well-doing look for it: So that the Reward of our Obedience is as sure as God is true; and if *we set our Affections on Things above, and not on Things of the Earth*, we shall not fail of gaining what we desire; but *when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in Glory.*

The only Danger is on our Part; and here indeed there would be great Danger, if we were left to our selves, and had nothing but our own natural Strength, to combat with all our mighty spiritual Adversaries, and to overcome all those Difficulties that we may meet with in our Way to Heaven. But, Thanks be to God, we are not left thus destitute; but he has also promised to give the Assistance of his holy Spirit to them that ask it. And if God be so ready and willing to assist us, the weakest of us all may be able to say with St. Paul, *I can do all Things through Christ that strengthneth me.* Though our Enemies be strong and mighty, yet if God be for us, we shall be stronger and mightier than they; and nothing will be able to hinder our Progress in Piety and Virtue, till at length we receive the End of our Labours, the Salvation of our Souls, in the Day of our Lord Jesus.

And when once we shall have attained this Kingdom, we shall be in no Danger, nor so much as in a Possibility of ever losing it again. For the Riches that we lay up in Heaven, by Works of Piety and Mercy, are not such frail, fickle, and uncertain Things as our earthly Treasures are; neither *Moth nor Rust* can corrupt them, neither can *Thieves break through*, and *steal them* from us; but *the Inheritance reserved in Heaven*, for all those that diligently seek it, is, as St. Peter says, *incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away*, 1 Pet. i. 4.

And as through the Grace of Almighty God we shall thus, if we be not wanting to our selves, be able to conquer all Opposition from Sin and the Devil, and to attain God's Kingdom, so that in this respect, our Labour will not be in vain: So,

(2.) When we have attained it, we need not fear but we shall find all our Expectations fully satisfied; for it is nothing less than the *Salvation of our Souls*; it is *Joy unspeakable*; it is the Enjoyment of all those Delights and Pleasures that our Nature will be then capable of, which will also then be much more pure, and refined, and enlarged than now it is. And all this Happiness we shall possess pure and unimixed, without the least Alloy of Grief, or Trouble, or Pain. For, as it is said, *Rev. vii. 16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the Sun light on them, nor any Heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living Fountains of Water.* And, *God shall wipe away all Tears from their Eyes; and there shall be no more Death, neither Sorrow, nor Crying, neither shall there be any more Pain;* as it is said, *Rev. xxi. 4.*

Thus, you see, if we make it our chief Care to *seek first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, we shall certainly reap the Fruit of our Labour to our abundant Satisfaction; whereas all the Pains that we can take in seeking after temporal good Things, proves often to no Purpose; we may, after all our Care, easily miss of gaining them; or if not, they may prove very unsatisfactory when we have them. Seeing therefore there is not any greater Instance of Folly than to labour in vain, it is highly reasonable that we should alter the Drift of our Care and Endeavour, and *not labour* any longer, so much *for that Meat which perisheth*, as for *that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life, which the Son of Man will give us*.

But to all that has been said, perhaps it will be objected, that should we be thus solicitous about our spiritual Concerns, and so neglectful, as we must then needs be, of our temporal, we might possibly be unprovided with Food and Raiment, and other Necessaries for the Preservation of this Life; which yet it is necessary for us to prolong as much as we can, if it were only that so we might the better take Care for another, which we cannot do, when once this Life is over.

But this Objection our Saviour himself has obviated, in the last Clause of the Text; *all these Things shall be added unto you*.

To explain the Meaning, and to shew the Force of which Motive, to engage us to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is what I should now have proceeded to do, if the Time would have permitted it: But I fear I have already tired your Patience.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons, and one God, be given, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.



DIS

DISCOURSE LXVI.

Religion a Divine Security from Want.



MATT. VI. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.



N discoursing on these Words I have formerly proposed to do these three Things.

I. To explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoined; and that I told you was, to make Religion the chief Concern and Business of our Lives; to desire the everlasting Welfare and Happiness of our Souls with a more fervent and passionate Desire than we do any earthly Good whatsoever, and to seek it and endeavour to obtain it in the Way of Righteousness, with greater Earnestness and Solitude than is allowable in the Pursuit of the Honours, Riches, or Pleasures of this Life, or even of our necessary Food and Raiment. For this Precept, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*, is plainly opposed to those Prohibitions in the foregoing Verses; *take no Thought, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed*; from whence therefore it clearly appears, that the Design of this Text is to put us upon such a kind of Care and Thoughtfulness about our future Life, as we had been before forbidden to use about our temporal Life, or any thing belonging to it; so that, whereas in our Desire of, and Endeavour after any worldly Good, we ought to be cool and moderate, and content sometimes to meet with Disappointments and bad Success, we may and ought, in our Desire of and Endeavour after this Happiness, and in using the necessary Means to attain it, to be as anxious and solicitous as ever we can, this being an Affair of such great Importance to us, that we cannot possibly exercise too much Care and Concern about it.

And therefore that I might persuade and enforce the Practice of this Duty, I proposed in the second Place,

II. To endeavour by some Arguments and Considerations to shew, how absolutely necessary, and how highly reasonable it is, that we should be thus more

more zealously and earnestly concerned about our everlasting Salvation in the other World, and the necessary Means of attaining it, than about any thing in this Life, or even the Maintenance of Life it self. And to this purpose I have formerly urged these four Considerations.

1. That the greatest Care we can take is no more than necessary for Heaven; whereas a more moderate Care is abundantly sufficient for this World; *i. e.* for all the Necessaries of Life; and about Unnecessaries and Superfluities, which are oftentimes rather Burthens than Conveniences, we need not be much concerned, seeing we may do well enough without them.

2. That in making that our chief Care we act agreeably to our Nature, and to the Design of God in sending us into this World; which was not that we might pass a few Years here in sensual Pleasures and Delights; but that by the good Use and Improvement of this short time, we might, thro' the Mercy of God, obtain for our selves a blessed Immortality.

3. That the Care and Labour that we bestow in seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, will bring us in more Profit, and turn to better Account to us by far than our worldly Care can do: The Kingdom of God, which is the End we aim at, being infinitely more worth our Pains and Concern, than any thing that this World can afford; and that for these two plain Reasons. 1. Because by that we provide for our Soul, whereas by our earthly Care we only provide for the Body; and, 2. because this serves only to provide for a short and uncertain Life; that for an eternal State.

4. Lastly, that if we make *the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness* the chief Objects of our Care and Endeavour, we shall certainly reap the Fruits of our Labour, to our abundant Satisfaction; whereas all the Care and Pains, which we can bestow on worldly Matters, may be bestowed in vain. For though we seek these things ever so earnestly and industriously, we may miss of gaining them; or if we should not, yet it is almost certain, that when we have them, they will not yield us that Content and Satisfaction which we expected from them: whereas, on the contrary, if we seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, we shall certainly, through his Assistance and Blessing, obtain what we labour for; and when we have it, it will certainly prove, in the Possession and Enjoyment, as great a Good as it before appeared to us to be; it will no ways deceive, but rather infinitely exceed all our Expectations concerning it; for *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart of Man to conceive, the Things that God has prepared for them that love him.*

These Considerations are, I think, of great Weight and Moment, and sufficient to engage us to the Practice of this Duty, of *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.*

All therefore that now remains needful to be done is, only to answer an Objection that will readily be made against it; namely, this,

That our present State and Condition of Life will not suffer us to be so neglectful of our worldly Concerns, as we must needs be, if we should follow the Direction that is given us in the Text, and make Religion our chief Business; because if we should do so, we should be destitute of Food and Raiment, and other Necessaries for the Preservation of this Life; which yet it is necessary should be preserved and prolonged as much as we can, if it were only that thereby we might make the better Provision for another Life; seeing all the Provision that can be made for our future State, must be made while this Life is prolonged and continued to us.

But now this Objection our Saviour himself has obviated in the last Clause of the Text; *all these Things shall be added unto you. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added*

unto you. And this was the Point which I proposed to discourse of in the third Place, and come now to speak to. Namely,

III. To explain the Meaning, and to shew the Force of the Motive whereby our Saviour himself enforces the Duty here enjoined; *seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and then, says our Saviour, all these Things shall be added unto you.*

Which Words, *all these Things shall be added unto you*, are not however, as I have formerly intimated, so properly a Motive to the Duty, as an Answer to an Objection which may be made against the Practice of it; for it is not therefore our Duty, it is not therefore so very much our Interest, to *seek first the Kingdom of God*, because by so doing we shall be provided with the Things of this Life; for the Kingdom of God is to be first sought for, for its own sake, because therein, *i. e.* in the Happiness of the other World, consists the highest and most consummate Happiness that we are capable of; and the Proposal of a lesser Good is by no Means a proper Motive to persuade us to aim at a greater. But nevertheless, it may well be proposed to us as an Advantage, and as some farther Encouragement to us, to seek after that greatest Good, that by seeking that, we shall be no Losers or Sufferers in any other respect; and that we shall not be, if while we are *seeking first*, with the most Earnestness and Concern, *the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, other good Things that we have need of shall be thrown in to us over and above. The Assurance that is here given us, that making Religion our chief Business, we shall want nothing that is needful for the Body in this Life, is not properly a Reason, why we should make Religion our chief Business; for we ought to make it so in Prospect of the great Recompence of Reward which is promised to good Men in the other World, how ill soever we fared in this; because, as Christians, we should *walk by Faith, not by Sight*, we should *not look at the Things which are seen, but the Things which are not seen*; for *the Things which are seen are temporal, but the Things which are not seen are eternal*. These temporal Things are therefore by no Means fit Objects of our Care and Endeavour, to whom far greater Things, even eternal Life and Happiness are proposed, which while we aim at, we should overlook and despise every thing which is less; and there is nothing in this World, not even Food and Raiment, not even Life it self, but is infinitely less: but it is our Infirmary, that we cannot overlook and slight these temporal things so much as we should. It would (and we cannot help it) be some Discouragement to us in our Passage to Heaven, to want necessary Provisions in our Way thither; and therefore it must needs be a good additional Encouragement to us, to be assured that there is no Reason to fear our want of any thing by the Way, to be told that *Godliness has the Promise of this Life, as well as that which is to come, and so is profitable for all Things*. This fully answers all Objections which we might have in our Minds against the Practice of it.

For I think there is nothing which can be objected against the Practice of the Precept in the Text, but only this, that such Care and Solitude as is required in the former Part of the Text, in *seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, would be a probable Means of shortening, or at least rendring very uncomfortable this present Life, by the want of Necessaries to support it. To this Objection therefore our Saviour here fully replies in the latter Part of the Text, by assuring us, that the *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, i. e.* the making of the eternal Happiness of the other Life our chief Aim, and Religion or keeping a good Conscience in all things our main Business, will be so far from being an Hindrance

Hindrance to us in the Acquisition of such other things, as are needful for the Support and Comfort of this Life, that it will rather be a Furtherance thereto. *All these Things*, says he, *shall be added unto you*. It is as if he had said; if you only labour for this World you may fail of Success, you may be left quite destitute, even of those Things wherein you seek to abound; for these Things are at God's Disposal, and he gives them to whom he pleases, and in what Measure he pleases; and has no where promised to give the largest Portion of them to such as seek most for them, and labour most diligently to obtain them; But, if pursuing these things with a moderate Care, you make it your chief Business and Concern to *seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, you shall not only have what you chiefly seek, but these other Things shall by the divine Blessing be added to you over and above. You shall certainly not only attain what you labour chiefly for, the Salvation of your Souls, but you shall besides have all Things necessary for this Life thrown in to you, into the Bargain.

This therefore is the Point which I am now to endeavour to make good, *viz.* not only that *seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness first*, is very consistent with all such Care as is needful for this Life; but also, that by seeking that chiefly and in the first Place, and these other Things only with a Care which is more moderate and subordinate to that, we shall, both according to the ordinary Course of Things, and also by the Promise and Providence of God, be much better secured against temporal Want, than we could be by employing our whole Care and Concern about providing for this Life only.

But before I proceed to the Proof of this Point, it will be needful first to state the Case truly, and to explain a little more fully the Meaning of the Promise, that is here made to such as *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, lest otherwise mistaking its Sense, and expecting more than is promised, we should, upon the failing of our own Expectations, be tempted to charge God with unfaithfulness.

All these Things, says our Saviour, *shall be added unto you*. Here then we may take Notice,

1. What it is that is here promised, *all these Things*, *i. e.* all such things as our Saviour had been before speaking of, that is, such Things as we have need of to *eat, and drink, and put on*; *all these Things shall be added*; *i. e.* not Riches and Honours, not Plenty and Abundance. These are things which God does indeed sometimes throw in to good Men, of his free Bounty and Liberality, but they are not the Matter of this Promise; what things he has here engaged his Word to supply them with are only necessary Meat, Drink, and Cloaths, such things as we cannot live without, or not with any tolerable Comfort. It is not promised to all such as *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, that they shall be Princes, or great Men; that they shall always live in great State and Splendor; but only that they shall not be destitute of Necessaries: It is not promised, that they shall live in Plenty, but only that they shall live well enough.

2. When it is said, *all these Things shall be added unto you*, we are not to understand those Words, *they shall be added*, as if God did hereby engage, that such Men, as made Religion their chief Business, should be provided for, by a special and miraculous Providence, with Food and Raiment, and all the other Necessaries of Life, without taking any Care, or being at any Pains at all about them. God never makes any such unconditional Promises of any kind: But rather this Promise, made to such as do *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, supposes that they

they do also seek for such other things as they may have need of, with a secondary and subordinate Care; it supposes them industrious to get their own Living in those lawful Callings, which they have been bred up to, or are able to exercise.

For indeed, if they be truly good Men, so they will, so they must do; they must be diligent in the Work of some lawful Trade, or Calling, to earn their own Living, or else they will be such as the Apostle styles *disorderly Walkers*. And so far is God from being obliged in Promise to provide Food and Raiment, and other Necessaries for such Men by a miraculous Providence, that he has expressly forbidden us to give any Relief at all to such Men; *i. e.* to such as are able to work, but will not, *2 Thess. iii. 6.* *Now we command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Tradition which he received of us, ver. 10. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat, ver. 11. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all; now them that are such we command and exhort, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own Bread, ver. 12.* And in this same Sense those Words of the same Apostle in *Tit. iii. 8.* are commonly understood. *This is a faithful Saying, and these Things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good Works; i. e.* to profess honest Trades; and again *ver. 11. Let ours also learn to maintain good Works for necessary Uses, that they be not unfruitful.*

This then is what we have to do to entitle us to this Promise; we must not only *seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, but likewise labour in some honest Calling to maintain our selves; upon which Terms we may reasonably trust, that we shall not want any thing that is needful for the Body, while it is needful for it; *all these Things shall be added unto you.* But then farther,

3. It is also to be noted and considered, that no temporal Promise, no Promise of any worldly Good whatever, can in any Reason be understood, as promising an Eternity of it; for if it did, it would be improper to call it a temporal Promise. Now such is the Promise in the Text; it is a temporal Promise, it is a Promise only of such things as are needful for the Body in this temporal Life. These Words therefore, *all these Things shall be added unto you*, cannot, in any fair Construction, be understood to signify more, than as if it had been said; all those things, which are necessary for the Support of this temporal Life, shall be added, and continued to you, for so long time as God shall see good to continue you here in this World. But that will not be always; for he designs, and has prepared for those that love him, and seek his Kingdom, a better Portion than this: What he gives to them here, is given to them only for their present Subsistence; what he designs for their Pay, or Reward, will not be given them till after this Life is over. The best Men therefore must dye; and the sooner God takes them out of this miserable World, the better it is for them: And when God is pleased to take a good Man out of this World, he may take him away by what Death he pleases, by Famine, as well as by Gout, or Stone, or Fever, or Impostume, or any other Disease or Casualty. Good Men and bad Men, all dye alike of all Distempers, and by every kind of Accident: And therefore there being, without doubt, many other more painful Ways of dying than by Want, a good Man cannot in any Reason think himself exempted from this, rather than from any other way of dying; and the Promise in the Text is in its true Sense

and Meaning made good to him, if by the Blessing and Providence of God he be supplied with all Things necessary for this Life, for so long time as it shall be good for him to live in this World; and when once he is gone from hence, he will have lack of nothing that this World afforded.

4. It is to be farther considered, that there is one Exception, with which all the temporal Promises of God, and therefore this as well as others, are to be understood; and that is the Case of Persecution. We are, I say, to understand all the temporal Promises in Scripture, as made with this Exception; viz. unless God shall think fit, for his own Glory, and the Benefit of the World, to make us Examples of Suffering and Patience; and that this Exception is sometimes expressly made, is Reason enough for us to think it always intended, though it be not always expressly mentioned. And this Exception is most plainly made in *Mark x. 30.* where our Saviour promises to those who lose any thing for his sake, that *they shall receive an hundred Fold now in this present time*; but then he adds, *with Persecution*; i. e. so far as is consistent with that State of Persecution, which God may sometimes see fit to put his most faithful Servants into.

And accordingly we may observe, that the same Apostle, who in *1 Tim. iv. 8.* says, that *Godliness has the Promise of this Life*, says also in *2 Tim. iii. 12.* that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer Persecution*; i. e. they must not think that any of God's Promises of temporal Good are to be understood, as promising an Exemption from Persecution. And our Saviour himself, who promises in the Text, that all the necessary things of Life shall be added, and thrown in to those, that *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, says elsewhere, *Luke xiv. 26.* that *if any Man comes to him, and hates not Father and Mother, Wife and Children, yea and his own Life also*, i. e. who is not ready, if God sees good to put him to the Trial, to lose every thing in this World for Christ's sake; *he cannot be his Disciple.*

But then to abate somewhat the Force of this Objection, so far as the Promise in the Text seems to be affected by it, it may be considered, that it is what rarely or perhaps never happens, even in a Time of Persecution, that any Man by keeping strictly to his Duty is, while suffered to live, both so clearly stripped of all as to be left destitute even of Necessaries, and also deprived of all Means of obtaining them. He may, indeed, (that is what has often happened at such times) incur the Loss of all which he has already gathered and laid up, or of all which was left him by Friends, which he hoped would have served to maintain him as long as he lived; but the Cruelty of Persecutors, if it spares the Life, seldom goes so far, as to disable those, whom they spoil of all, from being ever after in a Capacity of earning a living for themselves: And therefore I say, if the Loss which a good Man sustains by Persecution, be other ways supplied and made up to him; if after all that he had is taken from him, he be able from his Labour and Industry to gain more; or if by the Kindness of Friends, or even by begging, if he be not able to work, he is still supplied with all such Things as are necessary for Life; with these he may, and with these, if he be truly a good Man, he will be contented. For, as our Saviour says, *Luke xii. 15.* *A Man's Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things that he possesseth.* Some Men may be, and are contented, and consequently happy, with a very little, while others, being still gaping for, and reaching after more, may be, and really are, very miserable in the greatest Affluence and Abundance. Nay, as the Apostle says, *1 Tim. vi. 6.* *Godliness with Contentment is great Gain.* If a good Man, though he does not live in such Plenty as he has formerly done, yet may and does, not-

withstanding his Scarcity, live with Comfort and Peace in his own Mind; the Promise of the Text, though it seems not to be performed in the Strictness of the Letter, is yet made good to him, according to its true Intent and Meaning; which is only, that it shall be well with good Men, even while they live here. For it is indeed well with them, if in all their Wants and Distresses they can be content and chearful; much better than it is with those, who cannot be so in all their Plenty and Affluence. If no greater Affliction is laid upon them than they can well endure, of whatever kind the Affliction is they may well endure it, considering how much their enduring it will conduce to the Increase of their Reward in Heaven: For, as the Apostle says, 2 Cor. iv. 17. *Our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

The Sum then of that Encouragement, which is here given by our Saviour, to the *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is this, that if we are careful above all things to approve our selves to God, by a religious, sober and righteous Conversation, we shall not need to fear the ever wanting any thing which is necessary for our Support and Comfort here in this World, so long as it shall be good for us to be here; for that God will either so bless our honest Labours, or else other Ways will so supply us with these Things, and withal induce us with such Contentment and Satisfaction of Mind in our Condition of Life, whatsoever it is, as that upon the whole we shall be, even in this World, while we continue in it, sufficiently happy; and much happier still shall we be, when we shall be taken out of it, in what Way soever we shall be taken. This is the Meaning of the Promise, *all these Things shall be added unto you.*

I proceed now to shew the Truth of it; or what Reason we have to trust, that if we are diligent and careful above all Things to obtain the Favour of God, he will so order it by his wise and good Providence, as that either by our own Labour, if we be not wanting to our selves; or if we are not able to work, by the Bounty and Liberality of others whom he will stir up to be kind to us; or else by an extraordinary Providence, some way or other, we shall be sufficiently provided for with all Things needful for the Support of this Life, so long as God shall see good to continue us in it.

And we have great Reason to trust that it will be thus with us, from the Consideration of the Goodness of God, and of the many express Promises which he has made to this Purpose in the holy Scripture.

We have, on the contrary, no Reason to fear, that *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, other Things should be wanted by us; because Religion and Virtue have no tendency at all, naturally to bring us to want, but rather the contrary.

1. I say, the chief and best Assurance we have that our necessary Care about Matters of Religion shall be attended with a Competency of all such things as are needful for the Support and Comfort of this temporal Life, is, partly from the Consideration of God's Goodness and Providence, and partly from the many express Promises thereof made in the holy Scripture.

(1.) I say, we might be sufficiently assured, that *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, all other Things should be added unto us, only from the Consideration of God's Goodness and Providence in general, altho' he had not made any express Promise thereof.

And this Argument is very well and largely urged by our Saviour himself, in the Verses before the Text, to beget in us a firm Trust in God's Providence, that if we are not wanting in our Duty to him, he will not be wanting in taking such Care of us, as that we shall not be destitute of any thing which

is needful for this Life; and this too, although we are not anxious and solicitous about it. For these are his Words from the twenty fifth Verse of this Chapter, to the Words of the Text. *I say unto you, take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on. Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment? Behold the Fowls of the Air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit to his Stature? And why take ye Thought for Raiment? Consider the Lilies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his Glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so cloath the Grass of the Field, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven, shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little Faith? Therefore take no Thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be cloathed? (for after all these Things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these Things, ver. 25, to the 32. And then it follows; but seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness; and then all these Things shall be added unto you, i. e. you can have no reasonable Cause to doubt, when you consider and reflect upon the providential Care of God about other Matters, but that it will much rather furnish and supply you with all such Things as ye have need of for the Body.*

But having already spoken at large to this Argument, shewing the Reasonableness of trusting in God for all Things which we shall have need of for this Life, in a late Discourse upon those Words of our Saviour which I have now cited; I shall say no more of it now: Especially, because altho' from the Consideration of God's Goodness alone we might have been sufficiently assured of this, altho' it had not been expressly promised; yet, as I said in the second Place,

2. The clearest and fullest Assurance which is given us of this, is from the many express Promises which God has made in the holy Scripture, that he will provide for the needful Support of all such as are diligent in the Discharge of their Duty to him; so that, God having engaged his Word for it, upon the whole Matter, every good Man who makes it his chief Care to please God, and to keep a good Conscience in every Thing, has indeed a much better Assurance of all Things necessary for this Life, than he could have by spending all his Time and Thought in caring for this Life only.

And indeed the Promises of God to this purpose in the holy Scripture are so many, that it would be almost endless to mention them all; I shall therefore content my self, with only naming two or three which are very express.

Such is that in Psalm xxxiii. 18. *The Eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his Mercy, to deliver their Soul from Death, and to keep them alive in Famine.* Such is that in Psalm xxxiv. 10. *The Lions do lack and suffer Hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good Thing;* and such is that in Psalm xxxvii. 18, 19. *The Lord knoweth the Days of the Upright, and their Inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil Time, and in the Days of Famine they shall be satisfied;* and many more which might be mentioned.

And lest it should be said, that these are old Testament Promises, and so do not belong to us, it may be considered, that God has been pleased also in the new Testament to renew them, and to give us fresh Assurances of his fatherly Care in protecting and providing for good Men, even in this Life.

For these Words of our Saviour in the Text, were plainly spoken to his Disciples as Christians, and not as Jews and the Children of Abraham according to the Flesh, to whom the Promises of an earthly Canaan were made.

And

And St. Paul, who writing only to *Christians*, can't be supposed to have encouraged them to their Duty by such Promises of temporal Blessings as did not belong to them, yet says expressly, *1 Tim. iv. 8. that Godliness is profitable unto all Things, having promise of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.*

And that even the temporal Promises of the *old Testament* are not now outdated, but do belong to us *Christians*, as well as they did to the *Jews* before our Saviour's Time, we are clearly taught by the Author to the *Hebrews*, *Heb. xiii. 5.* where he declares that the Promise made to *Joshua*, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*, altho', at the first making of it, it seemed to be a particular and personal Promise made to *Joshua* alone, is yet to be understood as an evangelical Promise made to every good Christian. *Let your Conversation be without Covetousness*, says the Apostle, *and be content with such Things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

And that not this one Promise only, but likewise all such other temporal Promises in the Book of *Psalms*, and by the same Reason elsewhere in the *old Testament*, do belong to us *Christians*, no less than they did to the pious *Israelites*, the same Apostle plainly enough intimates in the next Words to those before cited, *viz. ver. 6.* by his citing a Text from thence, which he says, we also may apply to our selves; for these are the Apostle's Words; *so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what Man shall do unto me.*

All which places, (and I might cite many more Promises of God of the like kind, if I thought it needful) are, I hope, sufficient to shew, that God's Providence does take special Care of good Men, even in reference to this Life, to maintain them with Comfort, and to provide for them all things that are necessary; insomuch that he has many times put himself to the Expence of a Miracle for their Sustainance, as he did for a considerable Space of Time in the Case of *Elijah*; and for forty Years together, while he fed his People of *Israel* with *Manna* in the Wilderness.

But the Story of *Solomon* is so very remarkable to this purpose, that I can't forbear taking Notice of it, especially because it is supposed by some, that our Saviour, in the Text, had an Eye and Respect to it. You may read it at large in the third Chapter of *1 Kings*; but the Sum of it is this.

God appeared to him in a Dream, and bad him ask what he would; and all that he asked was, that he might have Wisdom to discharge well that great Trust which was reposed in him: With which Petition of his, it is there observed, God was so well pleased, that he thereupon assured him, not only of that which he asked, but added likewise of his own free Bounty (being not by his Promise thereto obliged) what he had not asked; Riches, and Honour, and length of Days; *ver. 16, &c. And the Speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this Thing; and God said unto him, because thou hast asked this Thing, and hast not asked for thy self long Life, neither hast asked Riches for thy self, nor hast asked the Life of thine Enemies, but hast asked for thy self Understanding to discern Judgment; behold I have done according to thy Words: Lo I have given thee a wise and an understanding Heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee: And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both Riches and Honour, so that there shall not be any among the Kings like unto thee all thy Days. And if thou wilt walk in my Ways, to keep my Statutes and my Commandments, as thy Father David did walk, then will I lengthen thy Days.* Which History is a Verification of our Saviour's Words here in the Text; in the highest and fullest Sense; that they, who seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, shall have all other Things added unto them.

Nevertheless I do not bring this Story of *Solomon* as a Proof, that God will deal out these worldly good Things, in so plentiful a Measure, to all who do in like Manner make it their chief Care to please God, and to do their Duty; I only bring it as an Evidence and Proof of divine Providence, and to shew that God does take particular Care of good Men; so that if they seek first his Kingdom, and the Righteousness thereof; i. e. are careful above all things to seek the Love and Favour of God, by doing those things which are pleasing to him, they may be sure that they shall obtain it; and consequently having him, who has all Power in his Hand, for their Friend, shall not need to fear ever wanting any thing which is necessary or expedient, even for this Life, for so long time as God shall be pleased to continue them in it: For that, as I have shewed before, is all that is here promised, only such things as are needful to carry them thro' this World, to a better. *All these Things shall be added unto you.*

And indeed besides, if so much as this had not been promised, and without recurring to a special and extraordinary Providence, there would be no just Reason to fear, that our taking such Care as is necessary about Matters of Religion, called here in the Text, *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, should ever expose us to the Danger of temporal Want.

And this was what I propounded to make good in the second Place, but, that I may not be tedious, I shall defer it to another Time.



DISCOURSE LXVII.

Religion consistent with, and conducive to temporal Interest.

MATTH. VI. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.



IN discoursing on these Words, I have formerly proposed to do these three Things.

I. To explain the Nature of the Duty here enjoined; by shewing what is here meant by the *Kingdom of God*, what by the *Righteousness of God*, what it is to *seek* them, and what it is to seek them *first*.

II. To endeavour to enforce and persuade the Practice of this Duty by some Considerations, shewing the Necessity and the Reasonableness thereof. And,

III. To explain the Meaning, and shew the Force, and manifest the Truth of the Motive to this Duty, which is annexed by our *Saviour* himself in the Text, *all these Things shall be added unto you*. And to endeavour from thence to shew how void of all Excuse they are, who while they are careful and troubled about other Things, do neglect, or take too little Care of this *one Thing needful*.

And the two first of these Heads I have formerly spoken to; and the last Time I entered upon the third, which was,

III. To explain the Meaning, to shew the Force, and to manifest the Truth of the Motive to this Duty, which is here, by our *Saviour* himself, urged in the Text, *all these Things shall be added unto you*.

Which Clause nevertheless, as I have already intimated, is not so properly a Motive to the Practice of this Duty, or a Reason why we should *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; but may better be considered as an Answer to the only plausible Objection which can be made against the doing it. For *the Kingdom of God*, that is, the Happiness of the other World, exceeding all which *Eye hath seen, or Ear heard, or the Heart of Man* can now

now conceive, is in it self so well worth our seeking for, that there needs no other Motive to induce us to seek for it, but only an Assurance, that if we do seek for it, we shall obtain it. But nevertheless, it may be objected against the Practice of this Duty, (and the Consideration thereof may be some little Balk and Discouragement to us) that if we are so very careful and solicitous as we are here commanded to be, about our everlasting Well-being in the other World, we may be thereby hindered from making such Provision as is necessary for this present Life.

To this Objection therefore our Saviour here fully replies, by assuring us, that our seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, will be so far from being an Hindrance to us in our acquiring such Things as are needful for the Support of this Life, that it will rather be a Furtherance thereto; for that, if we seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, we shall not only attain what we seek chiefly for, viz. the Salvation of our Souls, but shall have besides, all such Things as are needful for this present Life, thrown in to us, as it were into the Bargain, by God's Bounty and Goodness; *all these Things shall be added unto you.*

In order to the explaining more fully the Nature of which Promise, I noted, the last Time, these four Things:

1. That the Things here promised, *all these Things*, are only such Things as are really needful for the Body; that is, Meat, Drink, and Cloaths; not Dainties, not Superfluities, but such Things only as we cannot live without. So that the very mean and low Condition, in this World, of some good Persons, is no Objection to the Truth of this Promise.

2. I farther noted, that even these Things, the needful Things of Life, are not promised unconditionally to good Men; but it is supposed, that they are honestly industrious to get their own Living; as indeed, if they be really good Men, they must and will be. So that if an idle Man suffers Want, whatever Opinion he may have of his own Goodness, he must not charge God with Unfaithfulness, nor cast any Blame upon Providence; seeing he himself only is to blame, who neglects to use the Means which God has appointed, for the procuring of such Things as we need, for the Support of this temporal Life. And for a Man who neglects the Means which are put into his own Power, for his own Support, to look to be supported by Miracle, is a groundless and unreasonable Expectation; this is not to trust in God, but to tempt him.

3. I farther noted, that no Promise of any worldly Good can in reason be understood as promising an Eternity of it. When therefore it is said, *all these Things shall be added unto you*, it is not meant, they shall be added to you for ever, but they shall be added to you for so long Time as God shall see good to continue you in this World; so that when a good Man has finished his Course here, and God is pleased to take him to himself, he may, as consistently with the Truth of this Promise, take him out of this World by Hunger or Want, as by any other Disease or Casualty.

4. Lastly, I also noted, that this, as well as all the other temporal Promises of God, must be understood with an Exception of the Case of Persecution; so that consequently, whenever God sees good to make Trial of the Faith and Obedience of a good Man, or to make him an Example to the World of Suffering and Patience, he may make Trial of him by Hunger and Want, as well as by Stripes, or Imprisonment, or Death.

The Sum therefore of that Encouragement which was meant to be given by this Promise, is this; that if we are careful above all Things to approve our selves to God by a sincere Obedience, we shall not need to fear the ever wanting any Thing which is necessary for our Support and Comfort here in this World, for so long as it shall be good for us to be here;

for that God will either so bless our honest Labours, nor else will other ways so supply us with these Things, and withal endue us with such Peace and Contentment of Mind, in our Condition of Life, whatsoever it is, as that upon the whole we shall be, even in this World, while we continue here, sufficiently happy; and much happier shall we be, when we shall be taken out of it, in what Way soever we shall be taken.

And having thus explained the Meaning of this Promise, I then proceeded to shew the Truth of it, or to declare the Reason we have to trust that it will be made good to us.

And the best Assurance which we have of this was, I told you, from the Consideration of the Goodness of God, and of the many express Declarations and Promises, which he has made in Scripture, of his fatherly Care and Providence over good Men. And this Point I have already spoken largely to. But,

2. I said also farther, that although this had not been expressly promised, and without recurring to a special and extraordinary Providence, there would be no just Reason to fear, that our taking such Care as is needful about Matters of Religion, called in the Text, *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, should ever expose us to the Danger of temporal Want. And this is the Point I am now to speak to.

And that there is no Danger of our ever being reduced to Want in this World, by our *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; that is, by the Practice and Exercise of Religion; will, I suppose, sufficiently appear, if these three Things be considered.

1. That *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is very consistent with all such Care as is needful for the Body.

2. That many of the Duties of Religion, by the Practice whereof it is that we do *seek the Kingdom of God*, do also manifestly tend to promote our temporal Interest. And,

3. That there are none of the Duties of Religion, the Practice and Exercise whereof has a natural Tendency to reduce us to Want and Beggary.

1. I say, that the Duty here commanded, of *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is very consistent with all such Care as is needful for the Body; so that there is no Cause to fear, that by the Practice of it we should at all impair our Condition in this World. For the poorest Man living may *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; that is, may make it his first and greatest Care to be a good Christian, and to do his Duty; and yet be careful enough about the World, and have Time enough to spend in making all needful Provision for himself, and those who depend upon him. For Religion does not oblige Men to leave their Trades and Professions, but only to be honest and industrious in them; not wholly to neglect this World, but only not to set their Affections upon it, and to seek for somewhat beyond it. It is not necessary, in order to our obtaining God's Kingdom, that we should be always at Church, or upon our Knees; but only that we should maintain a constant Sense of Religion in our Minds, and express the same at all reasonable Times in solemn Acts of Devotion. So that there is no Man whatsoever, but who may serve God, both in the Church, and in his Closet; may pray to him as much and as often as he is enjoined to do; may give due Attendance to the hearing and reading of his holy Word, and perform whatever else is required of him, without any Hindrance to his worldly Business, if he be but careful to lay out his Time and his Business well beforehand.

Nay,

Nay (as I have formerly observed in treating on these Words) so far is Religion from taking us off from such Care and Labour as is necessary for this World, that it commands it; one part of the Duty which is laid upon us by our Religion, being to attend with Diligence to our particular Callings; according to that of the Apostle, *2 Thess. iii. 12. Now them that are such,* that is, who are idle, and work not at all, (for of them the Apostle had been just before speaking) *we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with Quietness they work, and eat their own Bread.* This therefore being a Duty laid upon us by our Religion, we do, by honest Labour and Industry in our lawful Callings, at proper and seasonable Times, as truly seek the Kingdom of God, as we do by any Acts of Piety and Devotion in their proper Season.

Let not any Man therefore pretend, that he cannot be so careful as he should be for this Life and for the next too; for he may be both, if he will himself; and neither of these Businesses is really any Hindrance to the other.

Let not, for instance, the poor Servant, or the labouring Man who gets his Living by hard Work; let not them, I say, pretend, (and yet they may, of all Persons, with most Appearance of Truth, pretend it,) that the Works, which they are forced to let themselves to, to earn their Bread, do so engross and take up all their Time, that they cannot discharge the Duty of the Text, of *seeking first the Kingdom of God*; or that if they should, it must be with Neglect of their Master's Business. For what is there, which if they had all their Time to themselves, they would do more than they may do now? Would they then allot some Time in every Day, for private Prayer and Reading? So they may do now; and if they cannot take it from their leisure Time, from that Time in which they are not held to Work, they may take it from their Sleep. Or would they, if all their Time were their own, constantly attend the publick Worship of God in the Church, on the Days appointed for Religion? This also they may do now, if not constantly, at least very frequently; and when they are by Necessity detained at Home, they may spend the Church-time, or a good Part of it at least, in Prayer, and Reading, and private Meditation; which, by the Blessing of God, may be as profitable to them who can do no more, as the publick Exercises of Religion may be to others: Or if what detains them at Home be some such Work as will also necessarily employ them there, as the looking after Children, or the Care of the Sick; yet even such Works as these, though they employ their Bodies, leave the Minds for the most part at Liberty for devout Thoughts and pious Meditations. To which may be added, that Charity is as proper a Work for an holy Day as Devotion; and therefore they need not fear that it is any Neglect of their Duty to God, if they are forced to spend that Time in doing good Offices to the weak and sick, which, if it had not been for that Necessity, they would have spent in some Exercise of Religion: For in such an Exigency as this, Mercy is more pleasing to God than Sacrifice.

What is it then, I say, that a Servant or a Day-Labourer may not do, which another Man not so tied to Work might do, in order to the attaining the Kingdom of God?

For if the other may be devout and religious, so I have shewed may he be too: He, I say, may have as much inward Piety and Devotion towards God as another Man; and if he do not, because he cannot, spend so much of his Time in the solemn Exercises of Devotion, that will not be imputed to him as a Fault, so long as he spends therein as much of his Time as he can.

He may also be as strictly just and honest in all his Dealings as another Man; and if he be, his Virtue will be the greater and the more highly rewarded, because by reason of his Poverty he lay under a greater Temptation to Dishonesty.

He may also be as charitable as another Man; I do not mean, that he can give away so much as they who have more may do; but he may give a little, and what he gives, he may give with a good Will; and if he does, his Work of Bounty will be accepted according to what he has, and not according to what he has not.

And lastly, he also may be as sober and temperate as any other Man; nay, indeed the Necessity which lies upon him to work, and the Need which he has of all his Earnings, to find himself, and those who depend upon him, with Necessaries, do really make the Virtue of Temperance easier to him, than it is to others.

Now in these Instances the *seeking the Kingdom of God* consists, *i. e.* in Piety, Honesty, Charity, and Sobriety; and therefore seeing he, who is most tied to Labour, may nevertheless perform all these Duties, it is plain that the necessary Care for the Things of this Life is no Hindrance to the Practice of the Duty of the Text; nor, on the other side, is *seeking first the Kingdom of God*, any ways inconsistent with such Works as are necessary for the Support of this Life.

The Truth is, *seeking the Kingdom of God* is not so much a Business of Time, as of Concern and Thought, of Watchfulness and Resolution; so that we may and do truly practise the Duty of the Text, even when we are most industrious in any honest worldly Employment, provided that we always keep strictly to the Rules of Justice in our Dealings, and do not set our Heart and Affection upon this World. Even the Servant, or he who is hired to work, needs not think that Day mispent in which he keeps close to his Work; or that because he is then busily employed in some Matter relating to this Life, as plowing, sowing, reaping, buying, selling, or the like, he does therefore all that while neglect or intermitt the working out his own Salvation; for on the contrary, he is truly serving God all the while that he is serving his earthly Master: If, I say, he be careful, and honest, and industrious in his Master's Service, or in the Work and Employment which he is hired to, he serves his earthly Master and his heavenly Master both under one; and at the same Time, and by the very same Labour of his Hands by which he earns Bread for the Support of this Life, he also makes a good Provision for another Life; according to that of the *Apostle*, Col. iii. 22. *Servants, obey in all Things your Masters according to the Flesh, not with Eyeservice, as Men-pleasers; but in Singleness of Heart fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, unto the Lord, and not unto Men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the Reward of the Inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

So that you see, the diligent following of our worldly Employments is no Breach at all of the Duty of the Text, nor any Hindrance thereto, provided that we take care to spiritualise our bodily Works, and do, in the Prosecution of our worldly Business, always keep our selves in a devout and religious Frame of Mind. And this we always may do, though our Work be ever so hard, and though it requires ever so close an Attendance. For we may, even while our Hands are employed in the Works of our Callings, have our Minds raised above this World, and the Pleasures of Sense; we may, even while we are earning Necessaries for this Life, in our Hearts and Desires aspire after Heaven, and the Enjoyment of God; we may have an Eye to his Glory, and our eternal Welfare, as the principal End even of these secular Employments; and this is to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*.

In fine, the Design of this Precept is not to take us wholly off from, or to make us negligent about our worldly Interests and Concerns; but only to regulate our Endeavours, and to moderate our Desires after them, and to persuade us to mind these Things with less Carefulness and Concern, than we do those Things which appertain to another Life; and that we may do, and yet mind them enough. And therefore seeing *seeking the Kingdom of God first* is so plainly consistent with all such Care and Labour as is needful for this Life; the present Necessity which lies upon any of us to provide for the Body, is manifestly no Objection against our practising this Duty. Especially if it be considered farther, in the second Place,

2. That the Duties of Religion, or of an holy and virtuous Life, by the Practice whereof it is that we do *seek the Kingdom of God*, are, many of them, such as do also plainly tend to promote our temporal Interests, to increase our worldly Store, or at least to preserve it from Wasting and Diminution.

For a good Part of our Religion consists in abstaining from the sinful Pleasures and Vanities of the World, which are commonly very expensive, both of our Time and of our Money: For what are the common Causes of Men's falling into Decay and Want? are they not, for the most part, Intemperance or Prodigality, or a riotous Course of Living? is it not the spending what they have, either in Gaming, or Drinking, or in keeping Company with lewd Women? or else, is it not because they are idle and lazy, and neglect their Business? These, I say, are the common Causes of Poverty; and therefore a good Man, and one who fears God, and makes it his chief Design to please him, is manifestly in less Danger of coming to Want than another; because all these Courses by which it is that Men are commonly reduced to Want, are also Breaches of his Duty to God, which he, as being a good Man, can by no means allow himself in.

And as for the rest of our Duties, such as Meekness and Humility, the Love of God and of our Neighbour, Justice and Peace, and the like, together with the external Fruits and Exercises thereof; these, if they do ever hinder us from any Gain, or put us to any Charge, or cost us any Time, yet it is not so much as the contrary Vices would do.

Thus it appears, that many of the Duties of Religion are such as do plainly tend to preserve at least, if not to increase our Store; and therefore it is evident, that thus far the necessary Care which we are bound to take for this Life, is no Objection against *seeking first the Kingdom of God*; seeing that at the same Time, and by the same Acts of Virtue by which we seek this, we do also take the best Care we can for that.

Some few Duties of Religion indeed there are, which may seem an Hindrance to our thriving in the World, which may be thought to restrain us from making such good Provision for this Life, as we might otherwise do; or may be reckoned chargeable or expensive, and consequently such as may expose us to the Danger of Want; as namely, first, all religious Exercises, which cannot be performed but in Time; and that Time being taken from our worldly Business must needs be some Hindrance to it; secondly, the strict Observation of the Rules of Justice in our Dealings, which must needs hinder us from making so much Gain, as other Men may do, who have no such Restraint upon them; and, thirdly, above all, the Practice of Charity, which (if of Things necessary to be done one may be judged more necessary than another,) is a Duty of all others the most necessary for the obtaining God's Kingdom: But now to part with what we have to the Poor, who are not able to requite us, is plainly to waste and lessen our Stock, and the ready Way to come to Want our selves.

In answer to which Objections, I therefore proposed to shew, in the third Place.

3. That there are none of the Duties of Religion, the Practice and Exercise whereof have a natural Tendency to reduce us to Want and Beggary; no, not those three before mentioned, which of all others do seem the most contrary to our worldly Interests, and the most likely to keep us from thriving, or to endanger our coming to Want.

(1.) Then, against what has been said; that the Practice of Virtue and Religion, by which it is that we *seek the Kingdom of God*, is in no Instance prejudicial to our secular Interests; it may be objected, that we are obliged, by the Rules of our Religion, to spend much of our Time in Prayer and Meditation, in hearing and reading the Word of God, and such other Duties as are properly called Exercises of Religion, the taking away which Time from our worldly Business must needs be some Hindrance to it; because we cannot attend to these Duties as we ought, without separating our selves at such Times wholly from the World, and withdrawing not only our Hearts, but our Hands too, from our secular Employments.

But in Answer to this, it may be sufficient to consider, how very little that Time is which we are bound to spend in such Exercises, in comparison with what the most busied Man may spare from Matters altogether useless and unnecessary.

For it is not the serving God, but our own Carelessness and Negligence, which robs us of our Time; when we spend those Hours and Days to no Purpose, or in sinful or immoderate Pleasures, or in excessive and carking Cares, or in melancholick Fancies and waking Dreams, or in impertinent Visits and idle Talk, or even in doing nothing at all, which might have been employed in the Works of our Calling, or in Acts of Piety and Devotion.

What is it, now and then, in the midst of our worldly Business, to cast up an Eye to Heaven, and send up a grateful Acknowledgment, a short Petition, or some pious Ejaculation thither? What is it to allot some little Time every Day for our Morning and Evening Sacrifices of Devotion, or one Day in seven for our publick Worship and Service? All this would be but a very small and insensible Hindrance to our worldly Concerns, if we were careful not to squander away the rest of our Time. And all this, and more, if Need were, might ordinarily well enough be spared from our Sleep, from our long Meals, and Excess in eating and drinking, from our Recreation, nay more, I fear I may add, from our Sin. And I believe there is not any Man so necessitous, but who, if he would husband his Time well, and be careful to lose none of it, might find enough for all the Duties of Religion, and yet be as industrious in his Calling, to get a Living, as he is now. But,

(2.) It was farther objected, that the strict Observation of the Rules of Justice in our Dealings, must needs hinder us from making such Gain, as we might do, if we had no such Restraint upon us.

In answer to which therefore it may be considered, that the Text (*all these Things shall be added unto you*) does not say, neither do I affirm, that a Course of Justice and Honesty is a probable Way of growing rich so suddenly as some Men do by Fraud and Extortion: But all that I affirm, and all that I have Ground from the Text to affirm, is only, that a just and honest Man needs not fear that his Honesty will ever be a Means of reducing him to Want. And this daily Experience and Observation do sufficiently attest the Truth of, *viz.* that Justice and fair Dealing, though it be not always so quick, is always a more lasting Way of getting. The Oppresser and unjust Dealer may perhaps get more in a little Time at first; but when he is once discovered, (and his Knavery cannot be long, will not be always hid,) his Gain, to be sure, is then at an end. Nay and it often happens that he

is forced to disgorge at once all his ill-gotten Wealth, and so is driven ever after, for want of Friends and Reputation, to live in extreme Want. Whereas the just and honest Dealer, who is content with moderate Gains, though he will not probably, without some great Hit, ever get together such a great Heap as the other may do; yet runs no such Hazard as the other does of being undone, and stripped of all, and is consequently much more probable to be exempt from extreme Poverty. But,

3. The greatest Objection of all against what has been said, that the Practice of Virtue and Religion is in no Instance prejudicial to our worldly Interests, is the Precept of Charity. For what can seem a more ready Way to Want, than to be continually giving away what we are justly and honestly possessed of, to such as are never able to requite us?

But to this it may be answered,

(1.) That no Man is obliged to give away to others, more than he can spare from himself; except in some extraordinary Cases: As when he has a particular Command to do it; which was the Case of the young Man in the Gospel, whom our Saviour commanded to *sell all, and give to the Poor*; or when the Number of the Poor is so very great, and their Necessities so pressing, that nothing less will suffice to supply their Needs, than the stripping our selves of all; which was the Case of the first Christians, who therefore *had all Things common*; and of whom *as many as had Lands and Houses sold them, and brought the Price, and laid it at the Apostles Feet, that Distribution might be made to every Man out of it as there was Need*. But this was plainly an extraordinary Case; this was indeed a great Trial of the Faith of those new Converts in this Promise of our Saviour, *all these Things shall be added unto you*: But they believed him, and the Promise was made good to them; for though they gave away all, yet they wanted nothing afterwards which they had given away: So it is particularly noted by St. Luke, Acts iv. 34. *Neither was there any among them that lacked*. They who thus parted with their whole Estates at once to Charity, the Exigency of the Times then requiring it, fared afterwards, if not quite so well as before, yet well enough; they wanted nothing.

But this, as I said before, was an extraordinary Case: For ordinarily no Man is obliged to impoverish himself for the Maintenance of others; because a less Charity is sufficient for that Purpose. And if a Man gives away no more than he can spare, he may be the poorer for his Charity, but he will never bring himself to Want by this means. Nay,

(2.) As he may order the Matter, he may give away a good deal, and yet not be the poorer for it; that is, I mean, by allotting and laying aside weekly, monthly, or yearly, as it comes in, such a certain Part of his Gain for charitable Uses, and by computing and reckoning his Income at so much less, and so ordering his Expences as he would really do, in case his Gains or Receipts were indeed so much abated.

For there are very few, except such as are themselves Objects of Charity, and such are not much concerned in the Precept of giving Alms; there are, I say, I believe, very few, if any, besides such, but who, if they can and do live within Compass upon their present Income, whatever it is, might also and would live within Compass, in case their present Income were lessened, or abated, by a tenth or a twentieth Part; or, in case as their Income now is, they are able to maintain themselves and Families to their Content, and likewise to lay up somewhat for Sickness, or old Age, or Children, they would likewise be able to do the same, although their Gains were a tenth or a twentieth Part less than they are. So that if, as their Receipts come in, they should lay aside such a certain Part or Portion thereof for charitable Uses, and reckon only the remaining Parts as their own, it would be easy for them,

by cutting off somewhat out of every Head or Article of their Expences, and abating somewhat in their Way of living in every respect; so to order Matters, as that, notwithstanding this Abatement of their Income by what they lay aside for Charity, they might, at the Year's End, be as rich, as if they had given away nothing. Or,

(3.) If it be supposed that the charitable Man, *who disperses abroad, and gives to the Poor*, will not be so rich as another Man in the same Way of getting may be, who gives away nothing; yet still this is no Objection against the Truth of this Promise, *all these Things shall be added unto you*: The Meaning of which, as I have already frequently hinted, is not, that they who *seek first the Kingdom of God* shall be richer than others; but only that they shall not, supposing them careful and industrious, be miserably poor: And that any Man should become so, by giving away to the Poor what he may, if he will, save out of his own Expences, is not at all probable.

So far from that, that, considering the divine Blessing which does always attend such Men, they do usually thrive much better than others; according to that Observation of the holy *Psalmist*, *Psal. xxxvii. 35. I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the Righteous forsaken, nor his Seed begging their Bread.* Which same Observation is also made by *Solomon*, *Prov. xi. 24. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to Poverty.*

And indeed besides, if we only consider the Nature of Men, and the common Course of Things, it is almost impossible that a charitable Man should ever be so necessitously poor as any rich Man may come to be, who gives away nothing.

For supposing, as the *Wise-Man* observes, that *Time and Chance happen to all alike*, and that a good and charitable Man may, by some great Loss or Misfortune, or Unsuccessfulness in his Business, come to lose all he has; yet still this is no more than what may, and what does often befall such as are most solicitous for the World, and never part with any Thing which they have, for the Relief of others; these Men also do meet with Losses and Disappointments, and are sometimes, notwithstanding all their Care and Saving, reduced to extreme Necessity. Now, I say, when this Case happens to both of them, as it may do, and at least as probably to the latter as to the former; the charitable Man will have a great Advantage of the other, who is then in the same low Circumstances; because he by his former Charity will have made himself many Friends against such a Time of Need: For it is not unlikely that many of those whom he has formerly obliged will be then in a Condition to shew the like Kindness to him. Or if there be none such, yet every one will think himself obliged to take Care of him, who was himself, while able, a generous Benefactor to others. Whereas the covetous Miser, who, when he was in a Condition to be kind to others in Want, hoarded up and kept all to himself; if ever he should come to Want, will be deserted and unpitied by all.

Thus, I hope, I have shewn, that if we are careful to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, we have no Reason to doubt, but that *all other Things shall be added unto us*. For besides the Assurance which we have of this from the Goodness and Promises of God, (which Point I have formerly insisted upon) I have now also shewn, that, without recurring to an extraordinary Providence, there is no Danger of our ever being brought to Want by the Practice of Religion and Virtue; because the necessary Care about Matters of Religion is very consistent with all such Care and Labour as is needful for the Body; and because many of the Duties of Religion are such as do manifestly tend to promote our temporal Interests; and because

there are none of them, the Practice and Exercise whereof has a natural Tendency to reduce us to Want and Beggary.

But to all that has been said, some perhaps will be ready to object their own Experience, who though they now spend their whole Time, Sundays as well as Working-Days, in caring for this Life, and improve it as much as ever they can for this Purpose, by embracing all Opportunities, whether lawful or unlawful, of enriching themselves; and also keep whatever they can get to their own Use, never parting with any Thing to the Poor and Needy, can yet make but a very hard Shift to live: And this is to them a Demonstration, that if they should practise the Duty of the Text, and *seek first the Kingdom of God*, that is, if they should bestow less Time and Care on these Things than they do, or be so nice as to keep strictly to all the Rules of Justice and Honesty, or ever part with any Thing to others, they should not be able to get, or should not have enough left, wherewithal to maintain themselves.

In answer to which, I will not deny but that this Matter of Fact may be sometimes true; that is, that many of those who have no Care at all but for this Life, do nevertheless live in great Straights or Wants.

But then I say, that the Inference or Conclusion drawn from thence is not true, *viz.* that if they should take less Care for the World, their Wants would certainly be greater than they are: But the Truth of the Case may be this, that their too great Care and their too little Conscience may be the Reason that they thrive no more; and that possibly they might be able to maintain themselves more comfortably, if they were not so anxious and solicitous about it as now they are. For *the Race is not always to the swift, nor the Battel to the strong*; but there is a God above who over-rules all these Things, and disposes of Events as he pleases; who gives to one Man Power to get Wealth, and not to another; and without whose Blessing upon Men's Labours, it is *in vain that they rise up early, and take their Rest late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness*.

If therefore it be true, as they themselves now own, that their Minds are so wholly taken up with worldly Cares, that they have no Leisure at all for the Worship and Service of God; and if it be true, that they make no Conscience of observing those Rules of Justice in their Dealings which he has prescribed, and that they never, or very rarely, upon any Occasion, part with any thing to the Poor; the hard Shift which they are put to, to live, is no more than they ought in reason to expect. For they can have no Claim to the Promise of the Text, who do not perform the Condition of it; neither are they proper Objects of God's Care and Blessing, who do so plainly distrust his Power and Providence, and reject or resist his Authority.

Seeing therefore the Method they have hitherto taken has been so unsuccessful, this is plainly no Reason why they should continue it; but rather, it is a good Reason why they should try another, even that which is here prescribed, of *seeking first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*.

And if they would be persuaded to take their Thoughts a little from the World, and to allot some Portions of their Time for God's Worship, and to seek his Blessing by a careful Discharge of all their Duties to him, and the constant Exercise of Justice and Charity, it is likely this Way would succeed better. Let them but take this Course, and then they may reasonably hope with less Care and Solitude for the World, to live better in it than they do now. For it is not the Care and Labour of Man alone which can make him thrive without God's Blessing, but that, with less Care and Labour, may be sufficient to do it; nay and that will do it. *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.*

But

But they would have God before-hand with them; and if he would but give them in hand such Store of all Things needful for this Life as they can ever have occasion to use; then, they say, having no other Care lying upon them, they would apply themselves to Religion, and set themselves with all Diligence to *seek the Kingdom of God*.

But is it so then, that God has lost, as I may say, his Credit so much with us that he may not be trusted? Is he indeed, is he known to be, so bad a Paymaster, as that we cannot prudently undertake his Work unless we have our Wages beforehand?

But suppose, for once, that God should answer the unreasonable Desire of these Men, and grant them all those Things beforehand which our *Saviour* here promises shall be added to those who make Religion their main Concern; what more Reason would they have then to set themselves to *seek the Kingdom of God* than they have now?

Perhaps they may say, that then they should be bound in Gratitude to do it; but are they not, are we not all of us, bound in that respect already? Let us consider what great Things he has already done for us undeserving, and how much Good he bestowed upon us before we had done him any Service: For he has given us Life, which is more than Food and Raiment; and he has most tenderly preserved our Life, though we have been hitherto very unmindful of his Kindness. How then can we think that he will use us worse, when, if I may be allowed so to speak, we shall deserve better? How can we imagine, that when in a due Sense of what he has done already for us, we shall heartily devote our selves to his faithful Service, he will then forsake us?

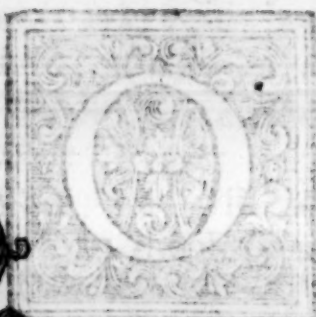
But perhaps it will be said by these Men, that if they were once, by the Bounty of Providence, freed from these worldly Cares, and from the Fear of future Want, the Glory of the other World alone, without any other Consideration, would then be sufficient to engage them to seek for it: But then I may ask what Assurance they have, that by *seeking the Kingdom of God* they shall obtain it? For they can have no other Security of this, but from the Goodness and Promise of God; and the same Goodness and the like Promise of God they have, that if they set themselves heartily to serve and obey him, they shall not want any thing which is needful, even in this Life. How then is it to be thought that they would trust him, for bestowing upon them the Blessing of Heaven and eternal Happiness, which is the greatest Blessing and Gift that he can bestow, when they are afraid to trust him for these earthly Things which are far less? Certainly, if their Faith be so little that they cannot trust him for the Performance of this Promise, *all these Things shall be added unto you*; the same Infidelity would much rather make them distrust his Performance of the other. So that I cannot but think, that if God, in Condescension to the Weakness of these Men's Faith, should supply them with all Things needful for the Body, both for the present and for the future Time of their Life, they would be then every whit as backward to the Duties of Religion as they are now; they would then, through the same Distrust of the divine Goodness and Promises, be for having Heaven also in present Possession, before they would set themselves to perform the Condition required of them to intitle them to it. This, I am sure, is Matter of daily Observation; that they who have the least need of worldly Cares, are not the most free from them; nay, I believe I may say, they are commonly most oppressed with them: And it is our *Saviour's* own Observation, that the poor of this World are for the most part in a better Disposition and Preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven, than the rich.

Their Pretence therefore is manifestly vain and groundless, who say they cannot so apply themselves to Religion and the Service of God as they would do, because they are poor and low in the World; for rather, their hard and low Circumstances in this present Life ought to make them the less fond of it, and the less careful about it, and the more concerned to obtain a happy and glorious Immortality in the other World. Being morally certain that they cannot, by any Thing they can do, raise themselves to worldly Greatness, they should the rather make it their earnest Endeavour, to seek for the highest Glory and Honour in Heaven, of which they are as capable as any other Persons whatsoever; especially being here also farther assured by our Saviour, that if they seek first the Kingdom of God, they shall not only obtain that, but also have *all these Things added unto them.*

Now to God the Father, God the Son, &c.

IV. ИТАЛИЯ

Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow; for the
Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it
self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.



Vol. II.

M m

DIS-

DISCOURSE LXVIII.

Anxiety for the Things of the Morrow considered and censured.



M A T T H. VI. 34.

Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow; for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.



OUR Saviour, in several Verses foregoing the Text, had been labouring to free his Disciples from over-much Carefulness for the Things pertaining to this Life; not only those Things which are superfluous and unnecessary, as Wealth, Honour and Abundance, (about which nevertheless the greatest Part of Mankind do mostly disquiet and torment themselves) but even those Things which are most necessary for the Support and Comfort of this present Life, Food and Raiment. We may be too careful even about these Things; *Take no Thought*, says he, ver. 25. *for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on*: Having enforced which Exhortation, in that and the seven following Verses, by several weighty and convincing Reasons; he proceeds in the Verse before the Text (on which I discoursed the last Time) to direct us rather to bestow our principal Care in providing our selves for another Life, by a conscientious Discharge of all those Duties which God requires of us; because that by so doing, we shall farther engage the Goodness and Providence of God to supply us with all Things for our necessary Support. *But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.* And then follow immediately the Words of the Text: *Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow; for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.*

Which Words therefore may be expounded in two Senses; for,

1. If we take the Phrase here used, *Take no Thought*, in the same Sense in which it had been used at the twenty fifth and thirty first Verses, then these Words contain only a Repetition and Reinforcement of the same Exhortation which our Saviour had made before; viz. that we should not be over-careful and solicitous in providing for our future State and Subsistence in this World; pressed by this farther Argument, that if any such Care and

Solicitude

Solicitude be necessary, at least it is not necessary yet a while; and that it will be soon enough for us to be anxiously solicitous about these Things, when the Time comes that we shall have need of them for present Use. *Take no Thought for the Morrow; for the Morrow shall take Thought for the things of it self.* Or else,

2. We may understand that Phrase, *μη μερμνήσῃς εἰς τὸ αὔριον*, thus; *be not thoughtful against the Morrow; i. e.* be not perplexed, and troubled, and disquieted before-hand, with the Thoughts of any Evil which may befall you to Morrow, or at any Time hereafter in this World; be not in Pain now, for the Pain which you may possibly undergo another time.

And this Sense of this Precept seems to me to correspond better with the last Clause of the Words; *sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*; and is besides very apposite to what our *Saviour* had been discoursing of in the foregoing Verses. For if we take the Words in this Sense, they plainly remove that which is the Ground and Reason of Men's Over-carefulness and Solicitude about the Means of their present Subsistence; *viz.* an unreasonable and excessive Fear of future Evils. For that which chiefly prompts Men to be so solicitously careful, as worldly Men generally are, about these Things, even about Meat, Drink and Cloaths, is a sad and fearful Apprehension of the Misery of wanting them; the Foresight of which puts them to as much Pain, and creates as much Trouble and Disquietude in their Minds, as the real Want of them would do. Now this, our *Saviour* here says, is very foolish and unreasonable; *take no Thought for the Morrow; i. e.* be not thus pain'd and disquieted before-hand, by the Fear, Foresight, or Pre-apprehension of future Pain and Misery; *for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; i. e.* when those Evils come, which you have this Prospect and Pre-apprehension of, then indeed you cannot chuse but be grieved and troubled: And *sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof; i. e.* the present Pain and Misery of such Evils, when they do come (if ever they should happen) will be a sufficient Load and Burthen to you; you will be miserable enough when they shall be actually present; why then should you anticipate your Misery, and torment your selves before the Time?

And this is that Sense of the Words, wherein I intend at present to discourse of them; *take no Thought for the Morrow, for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.* Only in discoursing upon this Subject, I intend not to confine my self to those Particulars which our *Saviour* here especially refers to; but shall endeavour to shew more generally, the Folly and Unreasonableness of tormenting and disquieting our selves before-hand with unnecessary Fears and dismal Pre-apprehensions: Whether of those, or of any other Evils and Calamities, which are incident to Men, while they live in this World. *Take no Thought for the Morrow; i. e.* be not before-hand troubled and disquieted with the Thought of any Pain which you may endure, or any Evil or Calamity which may befall you in this World, to Morrow, or at any Time hereafter.

In discoursing on which Words I shall do these four Things.

I. I shall shew, what Thoughtfulness about the future was not meant to be here forbidden.

II. What Thoughtfulness about the Evils which may befall us hereafter is unlawful and unreasonable.

III. I shall endeavour to represent to you the Vanity and Unreasonableness

ness of such Fear and Disquiet about our future State in this World, as is here forbidden. And,

IV. Lastly, I shall propose some Remedies for the Cure of it.

I. I shall shew, what Thoughtfulness about the Evils which may befall us hereafter in this World, was not meant to be forbidden in this general Prohibition: *Take no Thought for the Morrow.* And,

1. First of all, we are not to understand these Words, as if it was our Duty to live in this World in a State of perfect Security. Though we are now in Health and Peace, though we now enjoy great Plenty and Prosperity, we are not bound to presume, that we shall always continue in this happy Condition: Nay, indeed we are not at any Time to think, that the State of human Affairs is so firm and immutable, so fixed and settled, as that no Change can possibly happen. For,

(1.) First of all; such an Opinion of the Certainty of any thing in this World is very false and ungrounded, and it cannot be our Duty to believe a Lye; for the Histories of all Ages, and every Day's Experience and Observation, may abundantly assure us, that there is nothing at all certain in this World. It is therefore an unreasonable Vanity and Presumption, for any Man to promise himself an Exemption from those Chances and Changes, which he daily sees all other Men and all human Affairs are liable to. He who is in perfect Health to Day, may to Morrow be confined to a Bed of Sickness, from whence he may never rise again; and what may befall another, may befall me. He, who has now more Wealth than he can use, cannot tell how soon he may be reduced to the extremest Poverty; and therefore it is a Folly for any Man, how wealthy soever, to *trust in uncertain Riches*, which, as the *Wise Man* says, *make themselves Wings and fly away*. And the like may be said of worldly Honour and Greatness, or whatever else conduces either to the real or imaginary Happiness of this present Life. Every thing here below is fickle, and uncertain, and transient; and therefore for a Man to flatter himself, that he shall always certainly continue in the same State of Prosperity which he is in at present, is as unreasonable an Expectation, as it would be to presume, that the Wind shall always continue in the same Corner. For *Man is born unto Trouble, as the Sparks fly upwards*; as it is said, *Job v. 7.*

You have read in the Book of *Esther* the Story of *Haman*, the prime Favourite of the great King *Abasuerus*, whom the same Sun beheld feasting with the King and Queen alone at a royal Banquet, and hanging on a Gibbet. And as sudden, and almost as great, was the Change of *Job's* Condition; in the Morning blessed with ten hopeful Children, possessed of seven thousand Sheep, three thousand Camels, five hundred Yoke of Oxen, five hundred she Asses, and a very great Household, so that he was then the greatest of all the Men of the *East*; and in the Evening deprived of all, and stripped as naked as he came from his Mother's Womb; and within a very little while after full of sore and noisome Boils, and scraping himself with a Potsherd upon a Dunghil. Here we have an Example in *Haman* of a very bad, in *Job* of a very good Man, both alike falling in almost an instant of Time, from the Top of worldly Greatness, to the lowest Degree of Poverty and Contempt. In such Uncertainty therefore of all human Affairs, it cannot be any Man's Duty to be secure of what he enjoys, or to presume that his State is unalterable. Nay farther,

(2.) Such Security is so far from being a Duty, that it is a very great Fault, and what we are in Scripture particularly warned against. *Charge them that are rich in this World*, says the *Apostle*, *1 Tim. vi. 17. that they trust not*

in uncertain Riches, but in the living God. And the Pride and Security of some wicked Men in the holy *Psalmist's* time, is mentioned by him in the tenth *Psalm*, as a great Aggravation of their Wickedness. *His Ways are always grievous; thy Judgments are far above out of his Sight; and as for all his Enemies he puffeth at them*, ver. 5. i. e. he is so confident of his own Wit and Strength, that he never dreams of meeting with any Change in his Fortune, or Disappointment in his Designs. *He hath said in his Heart, I shall never be moved, I shall never be in Adversity*, ver. 6. Moreover,

(3.) Such Security, such Presumption, and Confidence of the Fixedness and Immutability of our present worldly State, has very often engaged God to convince Men of their Vanity and Mistake, by making them Examples both to themselves and others, of the Fickleness and uncertainty of all worldly Enjoyments. *When Men say Peace and Safety, then*, as the *Apostle* observes, 1 *Thess.* v. 3. *sudden Destruction cometh upon them*. The rich Man in the Gospel, *Luke* xii. 16, &c. who had filled his Barns, and laid up Goods for many Years, might probably have lived longer to enjoy them, if he had not foolishly promised himself such a sure and lasting Possession of them: But when he was too confident and secure, and thought himself out of the Reach of Fortune, God thought fit to shew him the Vanity of such Security, by summoning his Soul that very Night into another World; and then, says God, *whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided?* ver. 20. And when the holy *Psalmist*, after the End of his War with the House of *Saul*, thought himself now in so secure a Possession of the Throne, that there was no Manner of Danger of any farther Trouble, when he had said in his *Prosperity*, *I shall never be moved, thou, Lord, of thy Goodness hast made my Hill so strong!* No sooner had he said the Words but he was convinced of the Vanity of that his Presumption; for God hid his Face, and he was troubled, as it is said *Psal.* xxx. 7. God was pleased to instruct him thereby, by what Tenure it was that he held his Peace and Prosperity, viz. merely by God's continued Favour and Bounty, not by his own Strength, not by any Certainty and Immutability in the Nature of Things.

(4.) Lastly; as this vain Security and Confidence of the Unalterableness of our present State, is a likely Means to cause a sudden Change, so is it apt to render any such Change of our Condition for the worse much more grievous and intolerable than otherwise it would be; partly because whatever Calamity befalls us, while we are thus secure and confident, must needs be very sudden and surprizing, and it is a very great Addition to the Grievousness of any Evil or Calamity, if it comes upon us unexpectedly, when we think our selves secure, when we do not so much as dream that any such Calamity is either likely, or so much as possible to befall us; partly because whenever any Evil comes upon us unexpectedly, it finds us unprovided to bear it, and also renders us incapable of using our Reason, either to furnish our Minds with such wise Considerations as might help us to sustain it, or to find out, and put in Execution, the probable Means of delivering our selves from it.

It is good Advice therefore to all Men, even when they are most in Health and Safety, and in the most ^b flourishing and prosperous Condition, often to

^a Incertum quid agam, quia præter spem, atque incredibile hoc mihi obtigit:

Ita sum irritatus, animum ut nequeam ad cogitandum instituire, *Terent. Phorm.*

^b Quamobrem omnes, cum secundæ res sunt maxime, tum maxime

Meditari secum oportet, quò pacto adversam ærumnam ferant.

Pericla, damna, exilia peregrè rediens semper cogitet,

Aut filii peccatum, aut uxoris mortem, aut morbum filii:

Communia esse hæc; fieri posse; ut ne quid animo sit novum:

Quidquid præter spem eveniat, omne id deputare esse in lucro.

Ibid.

consider of the Uncertainty and Mutability of their State; that though they are now rich, they may be poor; that though they are now in Health, they may be sick; that though they are now honourable, they may be despised; that though they are now compassed about with many loving Friends and Relations, they may very soon be left quite desolate, or those Friends may turn to be their Enemies: *Communia esse hæc*; that these are such ill Accidents as are common to Men, such as have befallen many, and such as may befall any Man. Because that when a Man has used himself to such Thoughts and Meditations as these, nothing new or unexpected can ever befall him. When he has enured himself to the Contemplation of the Vanity and Uncertainty of all worldly Enjoyments, no ill Accident will ever amaze or surprise him. When he returns home after a Journey, and is welcomed with the sad News of the Death of a Friend, or the Miscarriage of a Relation, or some great Loss which has befallen him in his Estate, he will not be at all astonished, though he may be grieved to hear it; because it was no more than he knew might happen, it was no more than might have happened much sooner. If a Man be told, that a Glass or an earthen Vessel is broken, he may be concerned a little for the Loss, but he won't wonder at all at the Accident, *viz.* that a brittle Thing should be broken; and he will no more wonder at it that a mortal Man is dead, for it is no more than what may at any time be looked for; or that a Ship is cast away, for he knew when he sent it out that it might miscarry; or that a House is burnt, for he knew that it was built of combustible Materials. And on the other side, if things do not happen so ill as they might have done, his daily Escapes will be a fresh Ground of daily Rejoycing, and he will receive the Continuance of his prosperous State as a new Blessing, and with the same Gladness of Mind, which he would have done a Deliverance from some sore Calamity. This is the first Thing; when our Saviour bids us to *take no Thought for the Morrow*; *i. e.* not to be over-concerned and solicitous about future Events, it was not his Intention to make Men secure, and confident of the Continuance of their present Enjoyments. Neither,

2. Was it his Meaning hereby to forbid Men to make use of their Eyes to see before them, or to make a Judgment by the Skill which they may have gotten, either from their own Observation, or the Histories of past Times, what Evil Events are likely to happen. It is a prudent Way of Reasoning; thus; Such and such Causes have usually produced such and such Effects; if therefore these Causes are now visibly in being, it is probable enough that the same Effects will follow. So when a Man sees the Clouds gathering from all the Quarters of Heaven, and the Air on a sudden grow thick and dark, he cannot but conclude that a Storm is likely to ensue; though after all, it is possible, that one Wind may so over-power the rest as to disperse or carry off the Vapours, so that the Sky may clear up, and the Sun break forth again. But yet nevertheless, because contrary Winds and a sudden Blackness do use to portend a Storm, no wise Man could have concluded otherwise but that a Storm was probable; and no wise Man, in such a probable Danger of a Storm, but would have provided as well as he could against it. And therefore I add farther in the third Place,

3. That when we are forbidden to be thoughtful against the Morrow, we are not so to understand these Words, as if it were our Duty to be altogether careless and unconcerned, when we see, as we think, any Evil coming to us; neither are we forbidden to use all lawful and prudent Means to avert those Evils which are otherwise likely to happen, but may possibly by our prudent Foresight and honest Diligence be prevented or to preserve and keep

keep our selves unhurt by those Evils, whose coming we cannot altogether hinder. *A prudent Man*, (says Solomon, Prov. xxii. 3.) *foreseeth the Evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished.* Neither,

4. Lastly, are we to think that our *Saviour* hereby intended to forbid us to arm and provide our selves, either in general against any Evil which may possibly befall us, whether Poverty or Disgrace, Pain or Sickness, Loss of Goods, or the Death of Friends, or any the like evil Accident; or in particular against those Calamities which we foresee are probable to come upon us: For, on the contrary, a great Part of his holy Gospel is spent in giving us Rules and Directions preparatory to Affliction; such are, in particular, all the Precepts of Patience, Self denial, taking up the Cross, Resignation to God's Will, Contempt of this World, and the like; which Precepts we ought to learn before-hand, even when we are in the most prosperous and flourishing Condition, and in no probable Danger of any Calamity; that so the evil Day of Adversity and Affliction may never come upon us suddenly, nor find us unprovided. But especially when we have a Foresight of any particular Evil, which is very likely to befall us, and which cannot by any lawful Means which we can use be prevented, it is then, I say, more especially both our Duty and our Prudence, to fortify our Minds before-hand by wise and religious Considerations, that we may not be overwhelmed and cast down by it when it happens, but may be able to bear it like Men and like Christians. Such Instances of Thoughtfulness concerning the future, or *for the Morrow*, as these which I have now mentioned, it was not, I suppose, our *Saviour's* Design to prohibit in these Words: *Take no Thought for the Morrow.*

I proceed now in the second Place,

II. To shew, what Thoughtfulness about any worldly Evils which may befall us hereafter is unreasonable and unlawful.

And I suppose that all which our *Saviour* here meant to forbid, all, I think, which right Reason condemns in this Affair, is an excessive Fear of, or Concern about such future Evils; and then our Fear of them, or Concern about them, is unreasonable and excessive: 1. When it exceeds our Faith: 2. When it puts us upon using any unlawful or unwarrantable Means to prevent them; and, 3. when it does as much disquiet and discompose our Minds, and make us as uneasy, as if the Evil which we fear were actually present.

1. Our Fear of any future worldly Evil is unreasonable and excessive, when our Fear exceeds our Faith; that is, when we think the Evil we are afraid of is so certain and unavoidable, that God Almighty himself is not able to hinder it; or when we think it would be so grievous and intolerable, that God Almighty either cannot, or will not, enable us to support it. The first argues a Distrust of God's Power and Providence; the second implies a Disbelief of his Goodness, or of the Truth of his Promises.

Of the first of these we have a remarkable Instance, in the seventh Chapter of the second Book of *Kings*. When there had been a long and grievous Famine in *Samaria*, insomuch that Women were forced to eat their own Children, and there was great Reason to fear that it would every Day increase, because they were closely besieged by a very great Army, and there was no armed Force in readiness to relieve them; *Elisha* prophesied in the Name of the Lord, that the very next Day there should be as great Plenty of all Sorts of Provisions, as there had been before a Scarcity. Nay, says a Lord, on whose Hand the King leaned, that cannot be, if God should make Windows in Heaven, and rain down Provision, it is impossible it should be so cheap and plentiful as you have said: The Prophecy was so strange, and so unlikely

unlikely to come to pass, that he could not believe that God himself was able to make it good.

Now, I say, when our Fear of any temporal Evil is so great, as to make us give over our Trust in God's Providence, it is very unreasonable; because there is nothing which can be too hard for God, a Being of infinite Strength and Power, and whom no Creature is able to resist; and it is excessive, because it puts us besides our Duty, and makes us cease our Dependence upon him, *on whom* we are commanded *to cast all our Care, because he careth for us*; and who has given us in all Ages abundant Proofs of his Care and Protection over Men, in the remarkable Deliverances which he has given to his faithful Servants from those Evils which seemed inevitably coming upon them: A very memorable Example of which we have in the Book of *Esther*, in the Deliverance of the *Jews* from the Destruction which was contrived against them by *Haman*, at the Time when his malicious Project was just upon the Point of being put in Execution.

And so likewise, when we apprehend the Evil which we are afraid of to be so grievous and intolerable, that we think it impossible that we should be able to bear it, then our Fear of it is unreasonable, and exceeds the just Measures; because God has assured us, and he is *faithful* to all his Promises, that *he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that we may be able to bear it*. And there can be no Reason to distrust either his Power or Goodness, or to question the Truth of his Promise, which he has so abundantly made good to his Servants in all Ages.

You have heard of the Patience of *Job* under the sorest Afflictions, and those accompanied with the most aggravating Circumstances; for from the greatest Plenty and Prosperity he was reduced to the extremest Misery, and (not now to mention all the Particulars of it) suffered both in his Body, in his Relations, and in his Estate, the sorest and most grievous Afflictions, which the Subtlety and Malice of the Devil himself could invent, who by God's special Permission was suffered to do him all the Hurt he could: And these Afflictions came upon him, when he had no Reason to fear or suspect them; and they came also upon him so quick one after another, that he had no Space of Time to recollect himself; for no sooner had one Messenger finished his sad Story, but he was followed close at the Heels by another, the Messenger of a sadder; and while the second was yet speaking, there comes in a third, with a still more lamentable Relation; and immediately after him a fourth, with the saddest Message of all, the Death of all his Children, by the Fall of an House upon their Heads. These were sore Trials indeed, and such as it might well be thought human Nature could not but sink under: And yet when all these Messengers had related their several Stories, and the good Man perceived himself, of the happiest to be become in almost a Moment of Time the most miserable and afflicted Person upon Earth, the worst Words which the Sense of his most miserable Condition did extort from him were these; *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord*.

You have heard moreover, I suppose, of the Patience and Constancy of the *Apostles*, and other primitive Saints and Martyrs, under the severest Persecutions; for *they had Trials of cruel Mockings and Scourgings; yea, moreover of Bonds and Imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the Sword, were burned alive, were torn in pieces by wild Beasts; in short, they suffered all the Torments which the Malice of cruel Men and Devils could think of; and they suffered them all patiently and meekly, without Shrieks or Groans, without any Tokens of Anger*

Anger or Impatience. Nay even the Women, and the Children scarcely grown up to Youth, were as forward to undergo, and did endure, with as much Patience and Courage as the stoutest Men, whatever Torments their cruel Persecutors were pleased to inflict.

Now if God could, if in fact he did, enable these Persons to bear patiently, and without lamentable Complaints, such Cruelties, as human Nature, not assisted by Strength from above, must necessarily have sunk under, why should we doubt either of his Power or Readiness to afford us the like Strength and Courage, to enable us to bear any Affliction which he shall please at any time to lay upon us? And if he can support Men under such Afflictions as these, much rather may we trust, that he will empower us to bear any of those Calamities which are common to Men, and not so very terrible to our present Apprehensions; such as Poverty and Disgrace, Pain and Sickness, temporal Losses, or the Death of Friends, and the like; and therefore we ought not to be unreasonably and unmeasurably terrified by the Foresight and Pre-apprehension of any such Things. But,

2. Then our Fear of any temporal Evil and Calamity, which may possibly befall us, is unreasonable and excessive, when it puts us upon using any unlawful and unwarrantable Means to prevent its coming upon us; for,

First of all, such a Fear of any future worldly Calamity, as engages us in any evil Act to prevent it, does plainly imply a Disbelief of God's over-ruling Providence. For if we did believe what we are abundantly assured of in the holy Scripture; that no Evil or Calamity does or ever can befall any Man unknown to God; nay, that nothing does ever happen to any of us by Chance, but always by his special Order or Permission; for *Affliction cometh not forth out of the Dust, neither doth Trouble spring out of the Ground*, Job. v. 6. and the Prophet assures us, *Amos iii. 6. that there is no Evil in the City which the Lord hath not done*; and our Saviour says, that *not a Sparrow falls to the Ground without him*; and that *the very Hairs of the Head are numbred*; (And accordingly holy Job, tho' Part of his Affliction was immediately caused by the Villany of Men, as the driving away of his Cattel, and the Slaughter of his Servants by the *Sabeans* and *Chaldeans*; Part seemingly by the more immediate Hand of God; *the Fire of God*, says the Messenger, *is fallen from Heaven, and hath burnt up the Sheep and the Servants*; Part by what we usually call Chance or Accident, as the Death of his Sons and Daughters by the Fall of an House upon their Heads; yet ascribes the whole of his Affliction, all that ever he suffered, to God's over-ruling Providence; *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away*) if, I say, we did believe that nothing does ever befall us but by God's Providence; and moreover, that he never sends any Affliction upon Men but for some very good Reason, either for the Trial of their Faith, or the Punishment of their Sins; we could not think the Commission of any Sin a likely Means to hinder any Evil that we fear is coming upon us; but rather, at such a Time, we should be more than ordinarily afraid of doing any Thing which might anger and displease him: We should be then more especially careful to avoid all manner of Sin, because the increasing of our Guilt by the Addition of any new Iniquity must needs be a more likely Means to hasten and ascertain the Evil which we fear, than to prevent it.

Besides; such a Fear of any future Evil, as engages us in any sinful Practice to prevent or avoid it, plainly argues a Distrust of God's infinite Power: For if we thought him of sufficient Ability to preserve us from it, we should not seek to the Devil, his greatest Enemy, for Help and Deliverance; but rather, as the Apostle exhorts, *in every Thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let our Requests be made known unto God*; and trust to him, whose Wisdom and Power do infinitely exceed our Conceptions of them, to

find out some Expedient for our Safety, and to deal with us, and do for us, as seemeth him good.

Again; such a Dread of any Calamity which can befall us in this World, as puts us upon using any unlawful Means to hinder it from coming upon us, is most highly unreasonable; because Sin is the greatest Evil in the World, and what we ought in reason to be more afraid of than any Thing besides; and nothing can be more foolish, than to chuse a greater Evil to avoid a less. But for a Man to fear a little Pain and Sickness, Loss or Trouble, or even Death it self, and not to fear eternal Damnation much more; for a Man to chuse this, that he may avoid any of those, is the same, or infinitely greater Madness than it would be to fear a slight Scratch in the upper Skin more than a mortal Wound in the Heart, or to drink a Cup of deadly Poison to prevent a future Thirst. But,

3. Lastly; Then our Fear of any temporal Evil which may come upon us to Morrow, or at any Time hereafter, exceeds the just Bounds which both Reason and Religion have set to this Passion, when it puts us to a present Pain; when we do not only fear, but do also in a Manner feel those Evils and Calamities, which are not yet come, and which perhaps may never come upon us; when we are so disturbed, and so put out of Order by a Fore-sight of future Miseries, and our Spirits are so overwhelmed, and cast down by a Pre-apprehension of what we may suffer, to Morrow, or the next Week or Year, that we are able to take no Pleasure or Comfort in the Enjoyment of those Blessings, which the Bounty and good Providence of God affords us for our present Ease and Delight.

For what a palpable Folly and Madnes is it, needlessly, to no Purpose, and for no Good, thus to disquiet and torment our selves? For, as what is present is not the proper Object of Fear (we cease to fear when we actually feel an Evil) so what is absent, what is not yet come, what perhaps may never come, cannot be a just Ground of present Pain and Disquiet, because as yet it has no Being. And yet this is the Folly and Misery of Mankind, whom God has endued with Reason, that they might be the happiest of all his Creatures; and they make use of this Reason chiefly to vex and torment themselves, and so render themselves the most unhappy and miserable Part of the whole Creation. For other Creatures not being able to reflect on the past, or to contemplate the future, enjoy with Comfort that Portion of good Things, which the kind Providence of God has allotted to them; and when they are at any Time in Pain and Trouble they endure every Moment only the Pain and Trouble of the present Moment. They fear no Sickness till it seizes them; and tho' while it is upon them they groan and howl, yet as soon as it is over they forget it again, and are as easy and happy as they were before. But we, to whom God has given Reason to enable us to bear, without any bitter Groans or sad Complaints, whatever Evils shall befall us, instead of thereby easing, do only increase our Pain; we draw upon our selves now, by our own dismal Fears and Apprehensions, Evils which perhaps would never have come, at least not till many Years hence; and the Pain which we endure while we fear, is oftentimes greater than the Pain it self when it comes. We are afraid such Evils will befall us, and by our Fear we pull them down upon our own Heads; we draw towards us, and hasten on, that sorrow which we would avoid; we anticipate that Misery which yet we think will be too greivous to be born; and are as much disturbed and uneasy before it comes, as we shall be when it is come upon us. Nay, oftentimes, as I said, the Pain of Fear is greater than the Pain of the Evil it self; because by our Fears we feel all that Pain at once, which will come upon us only by degrees, and between every Part of which there may be long Intervals of Comfort; and moreover we endure all this very often,

over and over again, before it comes, which will be really present but once; and yet this Anticipation does not prevent its coming, nor render us easier under it when it is present; and as soon as one Evil is gone and past, we commonly begin to trouble and vex our selves with the Fear and Foresight of another.

And this is what our *Saviour* seems more especially to have designed to prohibit in this Place, where he bids us not to be careful and anxious against the Morrow; because, says he, *The Morrow shall take thought for the Things of it self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*: That is, the Misery of human Life is of it self sufficiently great, you shall not need therefore to add to it, and increase it, by your own Fancies and Imaginations; and it will come upon you soon enough, you shall not need therefore to hasten it by your Fears; and when it is come, you cannot chuse but be uneasy; why then should you be uneasy both now and then too? Will it not be sufficient to be pained and disturbed when the Evil is present? but must you needs be in Pain when it is not present too? what is Folly and Madness, if this be not?

And this should lead me to the third Thing, which I proposed to do in speaking to these Words, which was to represent to you the Vanity and Unreasonableness of such Fear and Disquietude about our future State and Condition in this World, as was here meant to be forbidden; but I must defer this to another Time.



DISCOURSE LXIX.

The Unreasonableness and Remedies
of Anxiety.

MATTH. VI. 34.

*Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow; for the
Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it
self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.*



THESE Words, as I have formerly observed, may be interpreted in two Senses; for

1. *Take no Thought*, may be understood in the same Sense here, in which the same Phrase had been used in the twenty fifth and thirty first Verses; and then the Rule or Advice in the Text will be the same in Sense with what had been there given, *viz.* that we should not be over-careful and solicitous about the Means of our future Subsistence in this World; *Take no Thought for the Morrow, what ye shall eat, and drink, and put on.*

Or else, 2. we may understand the Words thus; *Take no Thought for the Morrow, i. e.* be not fearful now, of what perhaps may befall you to Morrow; be not disturbed and disquieted beforehand, with the Thoughts of any temporal Evil, Hunger, Thirst, Nakedness, or any Thing else which may come upon you at any Time hereafter.

And this last Sense of the Words, besides that it is very apposite to what our *Saviour* had been discoursing of before, because it removes the very Foundation of Men's extreme Solitude in providing for the future; seems also more agreeable than the former to those Reasons by which our *Saviour* here backs his Advice; *for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; and sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof. For the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self*; that is, when any Evil does befall you, then indeed you cannot chuse but be in some measure pained and disquieted, according to the Grievousness of it; but it is too much to be troubled both now and then too, both when the Evil is present and when it is not present; for *sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*; that is, you will be wretched enough, when the Evil which you fear is come upon you; therefore why should you anticipate your Misery? why should you torment your selves before the Time? why should you be more miserable than needs must?

†

And

And this is the Sense of the Words wherein I propounded to discourse of them; only, as I said, I would not confine my self just to those Particulars which our *Saviour* seems here more especially to have referred to, *viz.* the Fear of Hunger, Thirst and Nakedness, or temporal Want; but shall endeavour to shew more generally, the Folly and Unreasonableness of vexing and disquieting our selves beforehand with unnecessary Fears, and dismal Pre-apprehensions of any sort of Evil or Calamity whatsoever, to which Men are liable, while they continue in this World. *Take no Thought for the Morrow.*

And I have already propounded to do these four Things;

I. To shew, what Thoughtfulness about the future, was not meant to be here forbidden.

II. To shew, what Thoughtfulness about the Evils which may befall us hereafter is unlawful and unreasonable.

III. To represent to you the Vanity and Unreasonableness of such Fearfulness and Concern about our future State in this World, as is here forbidden.

And,

IV. Lastly, To propose some Remedies for the Cure of it.

And the two first of these I have already done; what I am next to do, is,

III. To represent to you the Vanity and Unreasonableness of such Fearfulness and Concern about our future State in this World, as is here forbidden; that is, especially of being so disturbed and disquieted by such Fears, as not to be able to take Comfort in our present Enjoyments.

It is good for a Man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the Good of all his Labour that he taketh under the Sun, all the Days of his Life which God giveth him; for it is his Portion. Every Man also to whom God has given Riches and Wealth, and has given him Power to eat thereof, and to take his Portion, and to rejoice in his Labour; this is the Gift of God. So says *Solomon, Eccles. v. 18, 19.* But, on the other side, to be perpetually disquieting our selves with unreasonable and ungrounded Fears, to be ever in Anxiety about our future State and Condition in this World, to be always boding the worst, and aggravating in our Imaginations every worldly Evil which may possibly befall us; this, I say, is unaccountable Vanity and Madness. For,

1. If the Evil, which we have a Prospect of, be small and trifling, there is not sufficient Ground to be much troubled and disquieted about it beforehand; for why should a Man be excessively afraid of that, which, if ever it should befall him, will not be very painful and grievous to be born? Why should he be out of measure disturbed, by the Foresight and Pre-apprehension of an Evil, which, when it is actually present, will not much disturb and disquiet him? But now many, nay, I believe I may say, most of the Evils, which Men are so dismally afraid of, and with the Imagination and Pre-apprehension whereof they torment themselves, and render their whole Life uneasy and uncomfortable, are of this nature; they are generally small and trifling Evils, and, as I shall shew hereafter, nothing near so terrible and grievous in themselves, as they are in the Idea and Contemplation. For, as *Epicetus* truly observes, it is not the Thing it self, which generally disturbs and affrights Men, but the false Notion and Opinion which they have of it; they judge it to be a great Evil when it is not, or to be a much more grievous Evil than it really is. Just as a fearful Man, when he is travelling in the Night, and sees, as he thinks, a Person in the Road, making towards him, of a gigantick Proportion, and armed with all the Instruments of Death,

starts aside, and turns about to flee away, and has scarce Courage enough to look back, to see whether he be pursued or no; because he takes it for granted, that the Person, whom his fearful Imagination had dressed up so formidably, could have no other Design, but to rob at least, if not to kill him; whereas indeed if he had kept boldly on his Way, he would have found this terrible *Mormo*, which he was so horribly afraid of, to have been only a Bush, or a Tree, or perhaps a Shadow. But,

2. Suppose we are not mistaken in the Nature of that Evil which we have a Prospect of, but that it is indeed very sore and grievous, and such as, when it does come upon us, must needs make us uneasy: yet I say, nevertheless it is very foolish and unreasonable, to be out of measure disturbed and disquieted beforehand by a fearful Apprehension of it. For this is certain, that when such an Evil is actually come upon us, it will not be a whit the less grievous and troublesome, because we feared it so much before; I say, our past Anxiety and Disquietude, while we did contemplate it as coming, will not then, when it is come, in the least mitigate or assuage our present Pain. So that it is evident, that such Anxiety and Disquietude about it beforehand is at least altogether vain, and to no purpose. But that is not all;

For if Fear it self be a troublesome and painful Passion, as I suppose every one, who knows what it is, will readily grant it to be; it is moreover evident, that by excessively fearing any Calamity which may hereafter befall us, we do only render our selves more unhappy than the Evil alone would have made us, and make a voluntary Addition to our own Misery; for though we could not chuse but be miserable when the Evil came, we needed not to have been miserable till then. And I think it is not possible to conceive any more notorious Instance of Folly than this; because the Calamity it self will be very grievous, therefore to make it more grievous; because of it self, and by the Course of Things, it will come soon enough, sooner than we could have wished, therefore to begin our Pain presently, and not to take that Respite which we might have had; because we see, we cannot always be at Ease and Quiet, but that something will fall out to disturb our Tranquillity, therefore not to be at Ease and Quiet, when and whilst we may. This is the very Argument by which the Vanity and Folly of such Fears are demonstrated in the Text; *Take no Thought for the Morrow; for sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.* And, after all,

3. Perhaps what we fear is only possible, a Thing that may indeed happen, but which is not at all likely to come to pass. Now if so, it is plainly very unreasonable to be much disquieted beforehand by the Thought of it; for if it be only possible to fall out, it is more probable that it will not; so that there is manifestly greater Ground for Hope than for Fear: And when we torment our selves with the Fear of a barely possible Evil, we voluntarily endure a certain Pain at present, when what causes our Pain is an Event which is never like to happen.

Besides, if it be reasonable to fear any Evil which is barely possible, by the same Reason we should do wisely always to live in Fear of all possible Evils; and if we should do so, we should never enjoy one comfortable Moment in our whole Lives, because we can never be secure against all possible Dangers. For no Man certainly was ever, to Appearance, in less Danger of being knocked on the Head than the Poet *Æschylus* was, when he sat all alone, on a clear Sun-shiny Day, in the middle of a large Field; and yet the Event shewed, that he was not then so safe as he thought himself: For an Eagle, which at that Time chanced to hover over him, mistaking his bald Head for a Stone, let fall a Shell-fish to be cracked upon it, which by the Weight of its Fall broke through the poor Man's Skull. So that if we should be perpetually afraid of all the Evils then possible to befall us, and

should act accordingly, we must neither stay at home nor go abroad, we must abide neither in the City nor in the Field, we must be neither upon the Land nor upon the Water; in a Word, we must stay no where, we must move no whither, we must do nothing; for wherever we stay, wherever we go, or whatever we do, we are always in Danger of some Evil or other befalling us: And if nothing else should, our own Fears alone would certainly kill us in a very short Time. But,

4. Suppose the Evil we are afraid of be not only very grievous, but also very probable, there is no good Reason however, that we should be very melancholick and disturbed at present by the Foresight of it; for an infinite Number of very probable Things have never come to pass, and it is possible this may not, it is uncertain whether it will or no: So that when we disquiet and torment our selves with the Fear of it, we put our selves to a present certain Pain, for fear of one that is future and uncertain.

And besides, our excessive Dread of any Calamity likely to befall us is so far from being a probable means of averting it, that it is the most likely way to make it certain; inasmuch as it hinders us from using our Reason freely, in finding out and judging fairly, by what means the Evil may probably be put by or avoided; and also disables us from putting in Execution such Expedients, as our own Reason, or the Counsel of wise Men might suggest to us as likely Means of our Safety. For when a Man is in a great Consternation by reason of an imminent Danger, he neither is able to see his Way to escape, nor, if it be shewed him, is he able to take it; but he stands still in an Amaze, till the Evil overtakes him: *Fear being, as the wise Hebrew observes, Wisd. xvii. 12. nothing else but a betraying of the Succours which Reason offers.* Nay, not only so, but a great Dread and Consternation many times makes Men pull down upon themselves immediately those very Evils which they fear, and which perhaps otherwise would not have befallen them at all, at least not so soon. For so the rich Miser endures all his Life-time the real Inconveniences of Poverty, for fear that he should one Day come to Want; and many Men have died, and some have made away themselves for fear of dying. But,

5. Lastly, Admit the most that can be supposed, *viz.* that the Evil or Calamity, with the Foresight whereof we are at any Time disturbed, is not only very grievous, but withal so certain too, that there is no possible Means of escaping it, (though, by the way, this can hardly be supposed concerning any Evil which can befall us in this Life, Death only excepted; the Providence of God having very often found out Ways for the Deliverance of Men from such imminent Dangers, as to human Apprehension were altogether unavoidable; for hardly any thing can ever appear more certain than was the Destruction of the *Jews* in the Reign of King *Abasuerus*, when the Royal Decree was gone forth for that Purpose, and the very Day set, and that Day almost come; and yet the good Providence of God so ordered it, that on that very Day, instead of being destroyed themselves, they had Liberty given them to destroy all those Men who sought their Ruin. But, I say, admit the Supposition, *viz.* that the Pain or Calamity we are at any Time afraid of, is both grievous and certain, yet, I say) it will be easy to shew the Vanity and Unreasonableness of being beforehand tormented and disquieted thereby.

For if it be supposed certain, then it is plain, our Thoughtfulness will not prevent it; and if it be indeed grievous in it self, our Fore-taste of it cannot make it easy: And if it will do neither, then it is manifestly vain and to no purpose to disquiet our selves about it, but we had better set our Hearts at Rest, and think as little of it as we can.

Moreover, if the Evil be both grievous and unavoidable, it is unreasonable and foolish to make a voluntary Addition to it; the Evil, when it comes, will be *sufficient*, and it will come soon enough; we shall not need therefore to begin it sooner, and make it greater.

But the wisest Course we can take, in such a Case, is in the mean time to be fitting and preparing our selves to undergo what we cannot avoid, by laying in a Stock of Comfort, and by furnishing our Minds beforehand with those wise Considerations which both Reason and Religion afford us, to enable us to endure, with Patience at least, if not with some Measure of Cheerfulness, whatever Affliction or Adversity may possibly befall us while we live in this World.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew the Vanity and Unreasonableness of Men's disquieting and tormenting themselves, and making their Lives uncomfortable by the Foresight and Contemplation of any Evil which may befall them in this World, whether it be small or great, whether it be only possible, or very likely, or altogether certain and unavoidable. In all these Cases it is good Advice, *Take no Thought for the Morrow; for the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of it self; sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof.* And this was the third Thing I proposed to do.

But though this Advice may be acknowledged to be good and reasonable, it may be thought perhaps hardly practicable; because the Passion of Fear is natural, and a Man cannot forbear being concerned and discomposed, when he has a Prospect of any sore Evil like to befall him; although all the while his own Reason tells him, and he is fully satisfied in his Judgment, that his Fear will do him no Good. It is as natural for the Mind to fear an Evil foreseen, as it is for the Eye to wink when any Thing is suddenly moved before it, and one might be as well forbidden as the other.

But for all this, I do not believe, but that God has given our Reason Power to command and subdue our Passions, or that Fear is such an unruly and disorderly Passion, that it cannot be moderated and governed by Reason, or that there is any Man naturally of such a timorous Temper, as that by right Reason and religious Considerations he may not be brought to be not very much concerned about any Thing that may befall him in this World; but so as that after he has faithfully discharged his own Duty, and used all prudent and lawful Means for his own Safety and Welfare, he may be able to leave the Success to God, and to expect all future Events with great Calmness, and Evenness, and Indifferency of Spirit, and with perfect Resignation to the divine Will; saying, as old *Eli* did, when the Destruction of his whole Family had been foretold him by the Prophet *Samuel*, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him Good.* And this brings me to the fourth and last Thing which I promised to do, *viz.*

IV. To shew by what means this may be done; or to propose some Remedies for the Cure of unreasonable and troublesome Fears of any temporal Evil or Adversity, which may befall us while we are in this World. And,

1. First of all, it would do a great deal towards the curing of such Fears, and the begetting in Men a great Calmness and Evenness of Spirit, to learn them a true Notion of those Things which they are generally most afraid of; which are either Disgrace, or Poverty, or Pain, or Death; some or other of these likely to befall either themselves, or some other Person whom they have a Kindness for. For to these four Heads, I believe, may be reduced all the worldly Evils which Men either feel or fear, which the Subtilty of the Devil, or the Malice of wicked Men can inflict, and with the Foresight whereof Men are most apt to be disquieted.

Now tho' the *Stoicks* went certainly too far, when they affirmed these or the like Evils to be Things merely indifferent, and such as could not make a wise Man less happy than he would be otherwise; yet I believe it may be truly said, that they are not quite so great Evils as Men generally take them to be; but that what * *Seneca* says in the Case is very true, that *we are generally more afraid than hurt, and are oftner disturbed by our own false Opinions of Things, than by any real Evil in the Things themselves.* For,

(1.) What is Disgrace? I mean undeserved Disgrace: for it is in our Power not to do any Thing which may deserve it, and we shall not need to torment our selves with the Fear of what is in our own Power to prevent: What, I say, is undeserved Disgrace, but the vain and false Opinion and Talk of a Company of ignorant and foolish People concerning us? And would it not be a greater Evil to be commended and applauded by such? might we not, if we had the good Word of all such, reasonably think that we were like them, as vain and silly as they? and would not this be a much more reasonable Ground of inward Vexation and Disquiet to a wise Man, than it is to be spoken meanly of by such whose Judgment he has no Cause to value, whose Commendations would be a more real Reproach? Again,

(2.) What is Poverty, with the Fear whereof a great many Men, who have not the least Reason to fear it, do greatly torment themselves? What is it, I say, but the paring away of some useless Superfluities? The Table, it may be, will not be so well spread as it is now, but still there may be enough to satisfy Nature; a little is enough for that; and then there will be less Danger of surfeiting, which destroys many more than Hunger and Want. The Fare, it may be, will not be so delicate and costly as now; but no great matter for that, so long as it is as wholesome, so long as it nourishes as well. The Cloaths, it may be, will not be so fine, and gay, and fashionable, as now; but however, they may fit as close upon us, and keep us as warm. The House, it may be, will not be so large and well adorned as that we now live in; but the great Use of an House is to shelter from the Weather; and for that Purpose a less House, or a worse furnished one may do as well. The Attendants, it may be, will not be so many as they now are; but then there will be less Need of so many, and a few will be more easily kept in good Order. The necessary Provisions of Nature will not, it may be, come in so easily as now, will not be procured, it may be, without Sweat and Labour; but then this very Labour will create an Appetite, which will give a better Relish, even to homely Fare, and make it digest much kindlier, than all the Arts of Cookery.

And now, after all, what is there in a low Condition of Life so very much to be feared? For that what has been said is not mere empty Speculation, and idle Talk, any Man may be soon satisfied by his own Observation. Do but deign to cast your Eyes a little upon those, who are in that mean Condition which you are so horribly afraid of being reduced to, and see if they do not eat their Meat with as good an Appetite, whether they are not as free from Diseases, whether they do not live as long as other Men; see whether they do not sleep as soundly, whether they do not look as chearfully, whether they do not pass their Days as contentedly, whether they are not consequently in all Respects almost as happy, as they who have more, except only in the vain Opinion of the World. Nay, are they not in many Respects truly happier? generally not so greedy and ambitious, freer from Cares and Diseases, in less Danger of Violence and Robbery, not so liable to be falsely accused or basely flattered? They know who are their Friends

* Plura sunt quæ nos terrent quàm quæ premunt, & sæpius opinione quàm re laboramus.

and whom they may trust, which the great and wealthy can never know; and in fine, (which is no small Advantage) they are free from the tormenting Fears of Poverty, being sure that they cannot fall much lower than they are. And I believe indeed, it would be a real kindness to some covetous Men, who cannot take any Comfort in what they have for fear of coming to Want, if by the Providence of God they were brought a little nearer to this Scarecrow Poverty, that they might view it more clearly and distinctly; for then they would perceive, that it is not that formidable Thing which it appeared to them to be, when they beheld it at a greater Distance, and in a little time would learn to contemn, what they have a long Time so much dreaded.

(3.) In the next Place; What is Pain? I will not say with the *Stoicks*, it is no Evil; or that a wise Man under a severe Fit of the Gout, or Stone, or Cholic, or tormented in *Phalaris's* Bull, may be able to say, *O quam dulce est! How pleasant and delightful is it to be thus tormented!* But yet this I may truly say, that no bodily Pain is so great an Evil, as that it should be reasonable to live our whole Life in a constant Pain for fear of it: For if it be small it may be easily born, it is not consequently worth being much afraid of; and if it be very sore and grievous, it cannot be very long and lasting; for when Pain grows extremely violent, it takes the Head, and stupifies the Senses, or it quickly ends in Death.

But this, it may be, you'll say, is but small Comfort; for this same Death is the very *King of Terrors*; it is that which of all other Things does most terrify and affright Men. But that is not now the Question, whether Men are generally afraid of it or no; but whether they have Reason to be so very much afraid of it as they are. Let us therefore,

(4.) Examine the Thing calmly and without Prejudice: What is Death, *through the Fear whereof* a great many Men are all their Life time subject unto Bondage? What, I say, is Death, but the parting of two old Friends, or rather of two old Enemies, the Body and the Soul, which could never agree well together, which were always quarrelling and contending for the Mastery; *the Flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh*, as the *Apostle* speaks? What is Death, but the freeing of a pure, ethereal, and heaven-born Soul from a Lump of Clay, to which it was unhappily united, and which very much hindered the free Exercise of its intellectual and rational Faculties? What is it to dye, but to become like Angels? to make an Escape out of a noysome Prison? to knock off our Chains and Fetters? to shake off that Weight which clogged us, and kept us down here in this lower World, and to fly up to the pure and celestial Region of Spirits? This is Death; and if this be a Thing to be feared, what is there to desired? and if Death be not this to all that dye, it is through their own Fault only, and because they are wanting to themselves; for it is in every Man's Power, through the Assistance of the divine Grace, to make Death a very good and desirable Thing, the End of all Pain and Misery, and the Beginning of an endless Happiness. And therefore the *Wise-man*, speaking of the Death of a good Person, in *Eccles. vii. 1.* says, that *the Day of Death is better than the Day of one's Birth.* But,

2. If we cannot philosophise so much as to persuade our selves, that these Evils, incident to us in this mortal Life, are not such very dreadful Things as Men generally apprehend them to be; Religion however may teach us, (even while we retain the vulgar Notion concerning them) not to be unreasonably and excessively afraid of them; for thereby we are assured of these following Particulars, which, if duly considered by us, will be sufficient to support our Spirits, to discharge all unreasonable Fears, and to enable us, having been faithful in the Performance of our own Duty, to expect with very great Indifference the Event of Things.

(1.) We

(1.) We are assured that God governs the World, and consequently that nothing does ever fall out unknown to him, nay, not without his special Order or Permission; and therefore seeing he is an infinitely wise and good Being, we may be sure that whatever does happen in the World is, all Things considered, best, and what we our selves should perceive to be so, if we were as wise as he.

(2.) We are farther assured, that in the Administration of the Affairs of this lower World, God has a peculiar Regard to and Care of Mankind; nay, that his watchful and powerful Providence extends to every individual Person in the whole World; for so our Saviour argues at the twenty sixth and twenty eighth Verses of this Chapter, where he calls upon us to contemplate the Providence of God, even towards *the Fowls of the Air and the Lillies of the Field; and are not ye, says he, much better than they?* And in Chap. x. ver. 29, &c. *Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing, and not one of them shall fall to the Ground without your Father? but the very Hairs of your Head are all numbred: Fear ye not therefore; ye are of more Value than many Sparrows.* Moreover,

(3.) We are also assured, that this powerful and wise Disposer of all Things has a true Love to every individual Man in the whole World; which as he has abundantly manifested other ways, so especially has he done it by sending his own Son into the World, for the Redemption of all; or, as the Apostle says, *to taste Death for every Man.* And therefore from a Being so infinitely loving to us, we need not fear any thing which is hurtful; we may reasonably expect every thing which is for our Good. So the Apostle argues, *Rom. viii. 32. He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all Things?*

(4.) We are also plainly and particularly assured, that this wise and good Being, by whose Providence all Things in this World are ordered, takes no Delight in putting Men to Grief and Pain, that he never afflicts but for some very good Reason; *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men, Lam. iii. 33.* Nay farther, that he never sends any Afflictions upon Men, but when moved thereto by his fatherly Love and Kindness; and that the very Afflictions which he sends are an Argument thereof: For so the Apostle says, *Heb. xii. 6, 7. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastning, God dealeth with you as with Sons; for what Son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?* And consequently that the temporal Afflictions, which we may possibly undergo, are not, how grievous soever, a reasonable Cause of Fear, but rather of Rejoicing. *My Brethren, says St. James, Chap. i. ver. 2. count it all Joy when ye fall into diverse Temptations, knowing this, that the Trial of your Faith worketh Patience.* And to the same Purpose we are told by the Author to the Hebrews, in the fore-cited Chapter, ver. 11. *that though no chastning for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.* From whence he makes this Inference at the twelfth Verse; *Wherefore lift up the Hands which hang down, and the feeble Knees;* that is, let this Consideration of the Benefits and Advantages of Afflictions, and of the fatherly Love of God in sending them upon Men, inspire you with Courage and Resolution, that you may neither be daunted by the Foresight, nor sink under the Weight of any temporal Adversity.

And indeed, when we consider all these Things together, viz. that Almighty God, by whose wise and powerful Providence all Things in this World are ordered, has a peculiar Care of Men, and bears to them a fatherly Love and Kindness, and never chastens them but for their Good: we can

have no just Reason to fear or be dismayed, by the Fore-thought of any thing which may befall us; we cannot but think our selves much safer under his Protection, than we should be if he was pleased to permit every Man, to chuse for himself what State and Condition of Life he thought best: For it is certain we should not chuse so wisely; we should not deal so well by our selves, as we may be sure he will, who knows what is good for us better than we do; and has promised to do what is best for all them who are careful to please him: For *we know*, says the *Apostle*, *Rom. viii. 28. (i. e. we may be confidently assured of this) that all Things (being order'd and disposed by God) shall work together for Good to them that love him.* And therefore I add, in the third Place,

3. That the best Remedy against the Fear of any Evil or Calamity, which may befall us in this World, is a good Conscience, to be obtained only by the constant Practice of all the Duties of a holy Life. For indeed so long as Men continue Enemies to God through wicked Works, they have very great Reason to be always afraid; they cannot, unless they grow blind and stupid and sottish, but live in a perpetual Fear and Dread. For *Wickedness*, as the *wise Hebrew* observes, *being condemned by her own Witness, is very timorous; and being pressed with Conscience, always forecasteth grievous Things, Wisd. xvii. 11.* And so says *Eliphaz*, in the Book of *Job*, Chap. xv. 20, &c. *The wicked Man travelleth with Pain all his Days, a dreadful Sound is ever in his Ears; that is, even in Prosperity he does not think himself in Safety; he believeth not that he shall return out of Darkness, and he is waited for of the Sword; that is, "when he lies " down to sleep, he is afraid he shall be killed before Morning; and he " dreams he is encompassed by naked Swords."* To which agrees that Saying of the *Wise-man*, *Prov. xxviii. 1. The Wicked flee when no Man persueth: An evil Conscience makes them so timorous, that they never think themselves out of Danger.* But, on the other side, a good Man, he says, is not easily affrighted, a small Danger will not scare him; and be the Danger ever so great, he will be able, being embolden'd by Innocence and a good Conscience, not only quietly to expect it, but to go forth and meet it, with undaunted Courage; *the Wicked flee, when no Man persueth; but the Righteous is bold as a Lion.* And great Reason indeed he has to be so, especially upon these two Accounts;

Patrick in loc.

(1.) Because God is his sure Friend; *ye are my Friends*, says our *Saviour*, *when ye do what I command you.* And he, who has God for his Friend, has no Reason to be afraid of any Calamity, because no evil can befall him but by God's special Permission; he needs not be afraid of any evil Tidings, *whose Heart is fixed trusting in the Lord.* In the most perillous Times and in the greatest Dangers he may be able to say with the holy *Psalmist*; *The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom then shall I fear? the Lord is the Strength of my Life, of whom then shall I be afraid? Though an Host of Men should encamp against me, my Heart shall not fear; and though there rose up War against me, yet will I put my Trust in him. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the People that have set themselves against me round about. Nay, seeing he is my Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in Trouble, I will not fear though the * Earth be removed, and though the Mountains be carried into the midst of the Sea; tho' the Waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the Mountains shake with the swelling thereof.*

*

* Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum serient ruinae.

(2.) Such an one can have no Reason to fear, or to be much concerned about any thing that may happen to him in this World, because his main Concern is secured; so that though he may possibly meet with contrary Winds, and tempestuous Weather, and a rough Sea, yet he is sure of coming at last to his desired Haven, if he holds on his Course with Patience, and the Foresight of that unspeakable Happiness, which not long hence he shall enjoy, will make him not much regard, scarcely to be sensible of, those Difficulties which he meets with in his Passage to it; especially being moreover well assured that every Difficulty or Hardship which he meets with here will help to encrease his Happiness in the other World; according to that of the *Apostle*, in 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. *For which Cause we faint not, but though our outward Man perish, yet the inward Man is renewed Day by Day. For our light Affliction which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.* But,

4. Lastly, If what has been already said be not sufficient, to arm us against the Fear of any Affliction or Adversity which may befall us in this World, whether Poverty or Disgrace, Pain or Sickness, or even Death it self; there is still one Remedy left, which, if duly applied, will not fail to cure, even such as are most cowardly and timorous, of all unreasonable Fears of temporal Evils; that is, let them drive out one Fear by another, a less by a greater. Let them fear as much as ever they can; but then let them (as in Reason they ought) fear that most, which is most to be feared; let them fear God, and his Wrath, and that eternal Punishment which he will inflict upon all wicked Men, and then they cannot be very much concerned at those light Afflictions which are but for a Moment.

And this is the very Remedy which our Saviour prescribed to his Apostles, who were naturally of a very cowardly Temper; *Luke xii. 4.* where he begins his Discourse concerning the Hardships and Persecutions which they were like to suffer for his Sake, with this Advice; *I say unto you, my Friends, be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him who after he hath killed hath Power to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.* Let us but proportion our Fear to the Greatness and Certainty of what we are, or have Cause to be afraid of, and we cannot fear too much, unless our Fear should degenerate into Despair. And a lively Sense and Apprehension of the Wrath of God will find us so full Employment, in taking care to avoid it, that we shall have no Leisure to trouble our Heads much about any Evil which may befall us in this World.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be given, as is most due, all Honour, Glory and Praise, now and for ever. Amen.



DISCOURSE. LXX.

The Case of Judging considered and stated.



MATTH. VII. 1, 2.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;
and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be mea-
sured to you again.*



Have already gone through the two former of the three Chapters, wherein is contained our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: I go on now to the third, beginning with the Words which I have now read to you; which, as they are the Beginning of a Chapter, so, I conceive, they are likewise the Beginning of a new Subject, and have no Connexion with, or Dependence upon the foregoing Words in the former Chapter: So that in order to the right Understanding of them we shall only need to consider the Meaning of the Words wherein the Precept is expressed, and the Force of the Reason whereby the Observation thereof is perswaded.

Now the proper Meaning of the Word *κατακρίνω*, here used, is truly expressed in our Translation, by the Word, *Judge*; but then the *English* Word, *Judge*, as well as the *Greek* Word, may be taken either in a good or in a bad Sense: For in judging, that is, when we judge according to Truth, and when we have Warrant and Authority to judge, there is manifestly no Fault at all. But though the Word be capable of a good Sense, it is most commonly used in a bad one, where-ever in Scripture the Judgment of Men is spoken of; and without doubt our *Saviour* here meant some ill Thing by *judging*, when he so universally forbids it; *Judge not*: As may also farther appear from *Luke* vi. 37. where repeating this Precept, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged*; he immediately adds as explicatory thereof, *Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*.

But though the Prohibition be universal, it must yet necessarily be understood with some reasonable Restrictions and Limitations; and *judge not*, or *condemn not*, can signify no more than as if it had been said, judge not, or condemn

condemn not, without Reason, or without Authority to judge or condemn: For where we have Authority to judge, and when the Judgment which we give is according to Truth and Reason, it is not only allowable to judge, but in some Cases it is also our necessary Duty, as I shall shew by and by.

The Subject therefore of my Discourse upon these Words, shall be to shew,

I. When, and in what Cases, and upon what Occasions, and concerning what Things or Persons, we may, without Blame, make or give our Judgment; that is, what judging was not meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in these Words, *Judge not*.

II. To shew, what judging is unlawful, and was certainly meant to be here forbidden by our *Saviour*.

III. I shall then by some general Arguments and Considerations shew both the Sinfulness and Folly of such judging of others as was meant here to be forbidden. And,

IV. Lastly, I shall propose some Remedies for the Prevention and Cure of that general Proneness, which is in Men, to judge and censure one another.

I. I shall shew, when, and in what Cases, and upon what Occasions, and concerning what Things or Persons, it is lawful for us to make or to give our Judgment: I say, to *make* or to *give* our Judgment; for the Word *judge* comprehends both these. For we then judge, when we make a Judgment of any Thing or Person in our Minds; and we then also judge, when we declare our Judgment thereof to others.

Now that all kind of judging, whether of Things or of Persons, was not meant to be here forbidden by our *Saviour* in this universal Prohibition of all judging, is evident. For,

As to Things; that is, as to Matters of Truth and Falshood, or of Good or Evil, there is manifestly no Sin in making or declaring our Judgment thereof.

Nay, so far is this from being sinful, that it is our Duty, it is that for which chiefly our Reason was given us by God, that we might discern between Truth and Falshood, and between Good and Evil, in order to our chusing and cleaving to the one, and to our shunning and avoiding the other. *Why even of your selves do ye not judge what is Right?* says our *Saviour*, *Luke xii. 57.* And that Precept of the *Apostle*, *1 Thess. v. 21. Prove all Things, and hold fast that which is good*, plainly implies, that it is our Duty, after we have carefully examined the Reasons on both sides of any controverted Opinion or Practice, then to form a wise and true Judgment thereof in our own Minds, and to believe and practise accordingly.

And when we have upon good Reasons formed a Judgment to our selves concerning any such Point, there is manifestly no Harm in declaring this our Judgment to others; nay, this also is in many Cases what we are bound to do: Particularly, if the Opinion which upon good Grounds, as we conceive, we have found to be false, be also such as we believe will hazard the Salvation of those who hold it, by betraying them into some sinful Practice; or if the Practice which we condemn in our own judgments be such, as we conceive will be damnable to those who allow themselves

themselves in it. But this Case is so manifestly not included in this Precept of our *Saviour*, *Judge not*, that, I suppose, I shall not need to spend any more Time in the Proof it: For the judging which our *Saviour* here forbids, is plainly the *judging* concerning the *Persons* or the *Actions* of *Men*.

And yet neither was all such Judgment meant to be hereby forbidden; for,

2. It is evident, that it was not our *Saviour's* Intention hereby to forbid Men to judge of themselves, and to blame, and censure, and condemn their own Actions, whereinsoever they are conscious they have done amiss. For to do this, is so far from being a Fault, that it is a Duty, and a very good Means of Improvement in Virtue, and the Way to escape the Punishment of God, justly due to us for our Sins; according to that of the *Apostle*, 1 *Cor.* xi. 31. *If we would judge our selves, we should not be judged.* Where you see there is a Promise made to those that judge themselves, directly opposite to the Threatning here made to that Judgment which our *Saviour* here prohibits; *if ye judge, ye shall be judged*, says our *Saviour* here; but the *Apostle* says there, *if we judge our selves, we shall not be judged.* It is plain therefore, that the judging which is here forbidden is only the making or giving a Judgment concerning the Persons or Actions of *other Men*.

And yet neither is all such judging, that is, all censuring or blaming, or condemning the Persons or Actions of others, altogether unlawful, or meant to be here forbidden. For,

3. It is evident that our *Saviour* meant not hereby to forbid the judicial Proceedings of the Civil Magistrate; that is, his calling before him such as walk unruly and disorderly in their Stations; and examining into their Actions, and upon good Proof made of the Crimes they are charged with, condemning them to undergo such Punishment as their Crimes deserve. The absolute Necessity of such judicial Proceedings, in order to the Preservation of Peace and Justice among Men, makes it abundantly evident that it was not our *Saviour's* Design in these Words to forbid them.

Nay, on the other side, so far is such Judgment from being unlawful that to those who are placed in Power and Authority it is a necessary Duty; and they would be failing in the Trust that is committed to them by God, if they should not, to the best of their Skill and Power, endeavour to preserve Peace and Justice among their Subjects, by inflicting deserved Punishment upon all those who walk disorderly within their Society; and in order to which it is necessary, that they should first diligently enquire into their Behaviour, and pass a true Judgment thereupon. *The Powers that be are ordained of God*, says the *Apostle*, *Rom.* xiii. 1. And, ver. 3. *Rulers are not a Terror to good Works, but to the Evil*; and ver. 4. *He is the Minister of God to thee for good; if therefore thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the Sword in vain; for he is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth evil.*

And therefore this sort of Judgment, *i. e.* the Judgment of the Magistrate, is not properly the Judgment of Man, but the Judgment of God, whose Minister and Deputy the Magistrate is, as *Moses* tells the Judges in his Time, *Deut.* i. 17. *Hear the Causes between your Brethren, and judge righteously between every Man and his Brother, and be not afraid of the Face of Man, for the Judgment is God's.* The Sentence passed by the Magistrate upon Criminals, is God's Sentence; and the Punishment inflicted by the

Magi-

Magistrate upon the Disturbers of the publick Peace, is God's Punishment inflicted by the Magistrate's Hand. And so *Jehosaphat* tells the Judges which he had appointed throughout all the Cities of *Judah*, 2 Chron. xix. 6. *Take heed, says he, what you do; for ye judge not for Man, but for the Lord, who is with you in Judgment.* It is evident therefore, that this sort of Judgment was not here meant to be forbidden by our Saviour; the only Judgment which he intended to prohibit, was the Judgment of *private Persons*. And yet,

4. Neither was all private Judgment meant to be forbidden in this universal Prohibition; *Judge not*: For there are some Cases which right Reason teaches us, and which the holy Scripture it self warrants us to except out of it; particularly these three.

(1.) Where both the Fact and the Crime are evident and notorious; for in this Case it is no Act of Uncharitableness, to condemn in our own Judgments that which God himself has plainly condemned. Charity indeed obliges us not to judge beyond what we see; but it does not oblige us not to see what is plainly before our Eyes: Neither does it oblige us, in Contradiction to our Senses and to right Reason, to judge him to be a sober Man whom we know to be a Drunkard; or him to be chaste, whose Incontinency is notorious; or him to be just, who practises his Injustice so openly, that all who see him must needs observe it. Charity covers all those Faults of others which can be covered, and which we are not obliged, either in Justice or Charity, to reveal; but if any Man practises his Wickedness so openly, as that he seems resolved that all should take notice of it, no Charity can oblige us to go with our Eyes shut; and of what we cannot but see, we cannot but form some Judgment in our Minds, either approving or condemning it. And therefore if the Fact be such as must and ought in right Reason to be condemned, it is so far from being our Duty to judge well of it, and to call it by a good Name, that it is a great Sin so to do, and against which a severe Woe is most deservedly pronounced by the Prophet, *Isaiah* v. 20. *Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*

(2.) It is not always an uncharitable Judgment of others, to suspect or fear worse of them than we see; I mean when the Reason of this Suspicion is not any ill Will towards them, but an hearty Desire of their Welfare and Happiness, and that we may caution and advise them to beware of those Snares of the Devil, which we fear they are in Danger of. Thus a wise and good Father, though he knows not certainly any ill in his Children, though he is not sure they have committed any Fault; yet if there be any Ground at all but to suspect it, is apt to suspect and fear the worst: Not because he hates them, but because he loves them; because he has a tender Care of their Welfare. And therefore, before he is sure that they take any ill Courses, if he only fears or suspects it, he takes occasion to admonish them before-hand to beware thereof, knowing that such an Admonition before is more probable to do them good, than a Reproof or Correction afterwards; and that if it be as he fears and suspects, i. e. if they have indeed committed the Fault which he suspects and fears they have, it will be much easier to reclaim them by a gentle early Admonition, than it will be afterwards by a more severe Correction. Thus it is observed of *Job*, Chap. i. 5. that whenever his Sons and his Daughters had been feasting together, though he knew not certainly that their Mirth had been excessive or extravagant, yet fearing that it might have been so, he always sent and sanctified them, and rising up early in the Morning, offered Burnt-offerings according to the Number of them; for he said, it

may be that my Sons have sinned and cursed God in their Hearts. And thus St. Paul says of himself, 2 Cor. xi. 2. that he *was jealous over the Corinthians with a godly Jealousy*; that is, he was not uncharitably suspicious of them; he did not suspect worse of them than he had evident Ground for, out of Hatred or ill Will; but merely out of Tenderness and Love to them, and in order to warn and admonish them against such evil Practices as he feared they had been guilty of, or were in danger of falling into: *I fear*, says he, ver. 3. *lest by any Means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve thro' his Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ.*

And such Jealousy and Suspicion as this is so far from being a Sin in those who have the Charge and Oversight of others committed to them, that it is a great Commendation; being the Effect of the heartiest Love and Good-will to them. And therefore forasmuch as every Man is in some sort made by God an Inspector over the Behaviour of all his Brethren, so far as not to suffer Sin upon them, but to reprove them; it is no Uncharitableness in any Man, in order to the Discharge of this charitable Office of Reproof, to judge worse of his Brother than he has evident Grounds for; *i. e.* I mean, not that we are to think or believe that he is guilty of any Fault which we do not certainly know him to be guilty of, and thereupon to entertain a hard Opinion of him; but only upon Supposition that he may be guilty, when we have some little Grounds to suspect it, so to order our Admonition and Reproof, as that if he be really guilty of the Fault we suspect, it may serve to reclaim him from it.

3. Another Sort of private Judgment not meant to be hereby forbidden by our *Saviour*, is a Judgment of Caution and Prudence; which we may be allowed to ground even upon Suspicion and Conjecture only. As, to give you an Instance of it.

I have heard, suppose, of such a Man, that he is a Knave, or a Cheat; that he has wronged or defrauded several who have dealt with him, or trusted to him; but now who it was that told me this, perhaps, I do not remember, nor what Reason he had to say this of him. I ought not therefore, upon such a slender Ground as this, to pass a Judgment upon him so much as in my own Mind, or to condemn him as an unjust Person; and much less am I hereby warranted to represent him as such to others; this would be an uncharitable Judgment: But nevertheless, because I have been told this of him, and because I do not know but that my Information might be true, I may pass Judgment according to Evidence; *i. e.* I may judge it not improbable or unlikely that he may be such a bad Man as he has been represented to be; and thereupon I may very justly be cautious in my Dealings with him, and more watchful not to be cheated by him, than I would have been in dealing with another Man, of whom I suspected no ill, nor had any Reason to suspect any.

And the Reason of this is plain, namely, because so long as I do not upon this slender Suspicion conclude him to be an unjust Man, I am not uncharitable in my Judgment; and so long as I do not represent him as such to others, I am not unjust towards him: But all the Effect, which my Suspicion of him has, is, that it makes me more cautious in dealing with him, than perhaps I should otherwise have been; yet however not more cautious than I might fairly and justly have been in dealing with any Man, of whose Honesty I was not very well assured.

Nay, if in Consequence of my Suspicion, though so slenderly grounded, I should decline dealing with him at all; and chuse rather to deal with some other Person of the same Trade or Business, of whom I had never heard

heard any ill, there would be no Injustice in this; for there is no Injustice in chusing one Man to deal with rather than another, though there be no Reason at all for such a Choice; and much less if there be any Reason for it, though it be ever so small. But if there be any wrong done to the Person whom upon this Account I avoid trading with, it was done by him who gave me that Information of him, which made me suspicious of his Honesty; and if he had no good Ground for the Evil Report which he gave of him, he was indeed unjust in giving it; but if I had never heard that Report, I might nevertheless have dealt with another rather than with him; and my having heard some ill Things of him, though I know not from whom, nor upon what Grounds, cannot be thought to lay an Obligation upon me to trade with him.

Thus I have shewn, what sort of Judgment was not meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour*, in this general Prohibition; *Judge not: viz.* 1. Not a Judgment of Things; not the judging that to be good, which is plainly good; and that to be evil, which is manifestly evil. 2. Not the judging our selves, and censuring and condemning our selves, for any thing which we know we have done amiss. 3. Not the Judgment of the Magistrate upon such Persons as are brought before him to be judged: Nor yet, 4. and lastly, all private Judgment; particularly not a Judgment in notorious Cases; not a Judgment of Charity, a charitable Jealousy over others in order to their Good; nor lastly, a Judgment of Prudence and Caution. I proceed now in the second Place,

II. To shew, what Judging of others is unlawful, and was intended to be forbidden by our *Saviour*, in this Precept; *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

1. And first of all, this Precept of our *Saviour* must necessarily be understood, as meaning at least to forbid all false Judgment concerning others, the censuring and condemning them without Cause; the conceiving an ill Opinion of them without any Ground; and the judging of them as Reprobates, though we know nothing ill by them. This Judgment of others is therefore sinful, because it is false; and also because it is highly injurious to our Neighbour, nourishing in us Hatred and Aversion towards him. And it is likewise as foolish as it is sinful, rendring our Judgment in other Cases, even when we do judge right, less regarded. For as a Man who is notorious for Lying is never believed, no not when he speaks Truth; so he who is known to have passed a wrong Judgment upon some Persons, does thereby very much lessen the Value of his Judgment in other Cases; so that even when he does judge truly, yet Men will be afraid to rely or rest upon his Judgment. But,

2. Not only false, but also all rash Judgment, was hereby doubtless meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour*; *i. e.* when though not quite without Ground, yet without good and sufficient Ground, we judge harshly and uncharitably of our Neighbour, conceiving in our Minds a worse Opinion of him than we have a just Cause for.

And we may be guilty of rash Judgment several Ways; as for Instance.

(1.) We judge rashly, when we judge hardly and uncharitably of our Neighbour only from uncertain Report: And such Judgment of our Neighbour is therefore sinful, because it is very like to be false; for most of the ill Reports which go about are so, either in whole or in Part. Oftentimes the whole Report is false, raised by some one who bore him Ill-will, and had a Mind to disgrace him; but it rarely happens that the whole Report is true, and that the Matter of Fact is barely and truly related,

without

without the Reflections and Judgments which have been passed upon it by such as have related it; which Reflections, as the Story passes from one to another, come, in time, to be related as Part of the Story it self. And it rarely fails, but that, if we take the Pains to sift to the Bottom any ill Report which is spread about concerning others, and follow it to its first Head, we find the Report a great deal worse, than the Thing it self was which gave Occasion to it. Seeing therefore we cannot judge with any Certainty only from Report, we ought not to make any Judgment, other than a Judgment of Caution, from that only; and if we do, we are guilty of rash Judgment, because we cannot be sure that our Judgment is right, it being much more probable to be wrong. And this is intimated in that Advice given by our Saviour to the Jews, *John vii. 24. Judge not according to Appearance, but judge righteous Judgment.*

(2.) We are guilty of rash Judgment, when we censure any Man, or pass Sentence against him, only upon hearing his Accusation, without hearing what he hath to say in his own Defence; either to disprove the Charge brought against him, or to extenuate the Crime laid to his Charge. For it is but reasonable, that he who is best acquainted with his own Actions, and knows better than any one else, by what Motives and Inducements he was persuaded thereto, and what End and Design he had therein, should be heard as to what he has to say, as well as that we should hear others who know not so much: For the better a Man knows any thing, the more able he is to give full Evidence.

All that can be feared is, that a Man giving Evidence in his own Cause should be partial to himself, and represent Things to the best Advantage. But if he should do so, if he should relate his Case so fairly and plausibly, as to deceive the Hearers into a better Opinion of him than he deserves; it is not so bad however to be mistaken on the charitable, as it is to be on the uncharitable Side; it is better of the two to acquit a Criminal than to condemn the Innocent. For it is manifest Injustice in a Judge to have his Ears open only on one Side, to hear only what a Man's Adversaries have to say against him, who it is likely are as partial in their Accusation as he can be in his Defence; and thereupon to pass Sentence of Condemnation upon him, without hearing what he has to say to clear himself. And therefore this was a Law, or at least a constant Practice among the Romans, grounded upon great Equity, to give a full Hearing to both Sides before they condemned any Man; as we are told in *Acts xxv. 16. It is not the Manner of the Romans to deliver any Man to die, before he which is accused have the Accusers Face to Face, and have Licence to answer for himself, concerning the Crime laid against him.*

(3.) We are guilty of rash Judgment, and are uncharitable in our Censures of our Neighbour, when his Words or Actions being capable of a good as well as of a bad Sense, we put the worst Interpretation upon them, and take them in the worst Sense; and condemn him for that, for which perhaps God and his own Conscience neither do nor will ever condemn him. Such was *Michal's* Judgment of King *David*, *2 Sam. vi. 16.* who when she saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord, when he brought up the Ark from the House of *Obed Edom* to the City of *David*, despised him in her Heart, esteeming him to be a light, wanton, and shameless Man, for what he had done; as she tells him at the twentieth verse, *How glorious was the King of Israel to Day, who uncovered himself to Day in the Eyes of the Handmaids of his Servants, as one of the vain Fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself?* She reckoned his so leaping and dancing before the Ark, was the Effect of a too wanton and hury Temper, and unbecoming the Majesty of a King; when as in-

deed it was the Effect of a just and exceeding great Joy, for that great Blessing which God had vouchsafed him, in permitting him to bring up the Ark of God, the Symbol of his divine Presence, into his own City, and the Place which he had provided for it.

Now that such rash judging or censuring as this is a sinful and uncharitable Judgment is evident; for *Charity* (as the *Apostle* says in 1 Cor. xiii. 5, 6, 7.) *thinketh no Evil; Charity believeth all Things, and hopeth all Things.* He who is candid and charitable in his Censures puts the best Sense and Interpretation upon any doubtful Action of his Neighbour that it is capable of; and if it might be done with a good Design and Meaning, will suppose that it was so done, unless the contrary be evident and undeniable.

(4.) Another sort of rash and uncharitable Judgment, of like Nature with the former, is, when at the same Time that we pretend to judge of any Fault which our Neighbour has been guilty of, we do also in our own Minds act the Part of a Counsel against him, aggravating and heightening his Crime as much as we can, and determining to what Degree he is guilty. And this is manifestly a rash Judgment, because though his Crime be, as is now supposed, evident and notorious; yet we know not what Excuses or Extenuations it is capable of; and he who takes upon him to be a Judge, should be rather Counsel for than against the Criminal: And therefore, if he knows not certainly that the Crime was committed knowingly and wilfully, he should rather presume that it was done ignorantly or by surprize: And if he is not sure that it was a deliberate Sin, he should rather suppose that the Man was hurried to it by a sudden Passion, or a strong and violent Temptation: And if it be not evident that it was done with an ill Meaning, he should rather think that the Man's Intention was good, though his Action was nought. Thus Charity will incline us to judge of others, extenuating their Crimes as much as we can, supposing the best of them that can be supposed, judging them criminal to as small a Degree as is possible, and presuming that they were betrayed to the Commission of those Sins which they have been guilty of, through Ignorance and Inadvertency; unless the Malice and Wilfulness thereof be so very evident, that it cannot but be seen and taken notice of. For there are abundance of Circumstances which do much lessen and diminish any Crime, both in right Reason and in the Judgment of God; and if without notorious Evidence we suppose it to be cloathed with the worst Circumstances, our Judgment is rash and ungrounded, and, as it may happen, may be false and unjust; and the Man, though he has indeed committed a Fault, yet may not be near so faulty and criminal as we take him to be.

(5.) Another Instance of rash and uncharitable Judgment, is when we pass Judgment upon our Neighbour, from one or two single Actions of his Life, and not from the general Tenor of his whole Life and Conversation. As for Instance; when from an Act we infer a Habit, or from some few things that must be condemned in the Man, condemn the Man himself, and censure him as a Reprobate and Cast-away.

Now this sort of Judgment is rash and uncharitable, because it is built upon too slender Grounds. For the best of Men may and do fall sometimes, and there is no Man altogether without Fault. And therefore, to conclude, for Instance; that because a Man has been known to have been once overtaken with Drink, therefore he is a Drunkard; or because he has once committed such a Sin, that therefore he makes a common Trade and Practice of it, is a Judgment wherein we may very easily be mistaken; and wherein, whether we are mistaken or no, still our Judgment is rash and uncharitable, because it might not have been as we supposed

it was: And in any doubtful Case, Charity obliges us to think as favourably as we can of one another.

But it is yet rather more rash and uncharitable, when from some things which we see in our Neighbour which must be condemned, we proceed to condemn the Man himself, and to censure him as a vile Sinner, as a Reprobate and Cast-away. For the best of Men, and such as we are sure were the elect and chosen of God, have sometimes, in some few Instances, fallen very foully, and have risen again by Repentance; several Examples whereof the holy Scripture it self furnisheth us with, as in just *Lot*, in righteous *Noah*, and *David a Man after God's own Heart*, and diverse others. And therefore if we know any one of our Neighbours who has fallen in like manner as they did, we ought not immediately thereupon to pass Sentence of Condemnation against him, and judge him as a Reprobate; because though the Sin it self was such as must need be condemned, yet we know not but that the Man may have since heartily and sincerely repented of it, and so in judging him, we may condemn a Man whom God has pardoned and absolved.

In short, whether our Judgment in this Case be true or false, it is nevertheless a rash and unwarrantable Judgment; and we judge of Matters which do no ways belong to us to judge of, and which God has reserved entirely to himself. And so we are taught by the *Apostle*, *Rom. xiv. 4. Who art thou, that judgest another Man's Servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand.*

(6.) Another Instance of rash Judgment is, when we pretend to judge of the inward Thoughts and Intentions of Men, farther than the same are declared in plain Words, or by Actions of a certain Signification. For it is the incommunicable Property of God only, to search the Heart, and to try the Reins, and to know what is in Man. But when we pretend to know, and to give our Judgment thereof, our Judgment, if it be not always false, is always rash and ungrounded; because the very same Actions may be done by several Men, with very different Designs; and unless we could judge certainly of the Intention and Design, we are by no means competent Judges of the Action; because the moral Nature of any Action depends in great measure upon the Reasons and Motives of it; and upon the End and Intention which we had in it, of which none is able to judge truly, but God only. And this Argument against judging others is well urged by the *Apostle*, *1 Cor. iv. 5. Judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to Light the hidden Things of Darkness, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Heart.*

(7.) Lastly, we are then also guilty of rash Judgment, when we judge of the Qualifications of Men; that is of the Good or Evil which is in them, and what their State and Condition towards God is, by the good or evil Things which befall them in this World. There is no sort of rash Judgment of others more common than this, and none in the World more likely to be false; the Dispensations of God's Providence to Men in this World being so very uncertain, that, as the *Wise-man* says, *Eccl. ix. 1. We cannot know either Love or Hatred by all that is before us; i. e. we cannot judge with any Certainty, how God stands affected towards any Man by the good or evil Things which happen to him in this Life.*

And this sort of rash Judgment, viz. the judging Men to be wicked, because afflicted; or great Sinners, because grievously afflicted; our *Saviour* reproves at large in *Luke xiii.* at the Beginning; where some having told him of the *Galileans, whose Blood Pilate had mingled with their Sacrifices*, our *Saviour* perceiving what their Intention was in telling him that

Story;

Story; viz. that they conceived it to be a Judgment of God upon them, and an Argument that they were very vile and wicked Men, seeing God had suffered them to fall into such a Calamity; our Saviour, I say, takes Occasion from thence to declare at large the Rashness of all such Judgment as is past upon Men, from what befalls them, in these Words; *Jesus answering, said unto them; suppose ye that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, nay. Or those eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Thus I have shewn, what Judgment was not meant to be forbidden here by our Saviour; and in Part also, what Judgment it was his Design here to prohibit; particularly, 1. all false, and, 2. all rash Judgment of others; *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

But there are some other things also, which I suppose it was our Saviour's Intention to prohibit by these Words; the speaking to which, and to the other Heads which I proposed to discourse of, in treating on this Subject; I shall defer to another Opportunity.

For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

When I began to discourse on these Words, I proposed to do these four Things.

- I. To shew what Judgment was not meant to be forbidden by our Saviour in these Words.
- II. To shew what Judgment is unlawful, and was certainly meant to be hereby forbidden.
- III. By some general Arguments and Considerations to shew both the Sinfulness and Folly of such Judgment of others as was meant here to be forbidden. And,

- IV. Lastly, To propose some Reasons for the Prevention and Cure of that general Proneness which is in us, and continue one another.

I. To shew what Judgment was not meant to be forbidden by our Saviour in these Words; or, when, and upon what Occasions, and concerning what Things or Persons, without Blame give our Judgment. For the Prohibition is not universal, as it could be, if all Judgment had been intended to be hereby forbidden; *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* The making a Judgment in our Minds, or the forming and declaring the same, is not always evil. And therefore though there be no Exception or Limitation added in the Text itself, yet we are plainly enough taught, both by Reason, and by other Texts of holy Scripture, to understand this universal Prohibition with due Restrictions and Limitations; and seeing all Judgment is not in itself unlawful, as the Judgment of Falseness, of Pride, of Envy, of Malice, of Hatred, and the like, is; and the like.

After this I proceeded in the second Place.

DISCOURSE LXXI.

The Sinfulness and Folly of Judging.

MATTH. VII. 1, 2.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;
and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be mea-
sured to you again.*



WHEN I began to discourse on these Words, I propounded to do these four Things.

I. To shew what Judging was not meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in these Words.

II. To shew what Judging is unlawful, and was certainly meant to be hereby forbidden.

III. By some general Arguments and Considerations, to shew both the Sinfulness and Folly of such Judging of others as was meant here to be forbidden. And,

IV. Lastly, To propose some Remedies for the Prevention and Cure of that general Proneness which is in Men to judge and censure one another.

I. To shew what Judging was not meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in these Words; or, when, and in what Cases, and upon what Occasions, and concerning what Things or Persons, we may without Blame give our Judgment. For tho' the Prohibition be expressed as universally as it could be if all Judging had been intended to be thereby forbidden; *Judge not*; yet the Thing it self, *i. e.* the making a Judgment in our Minds, of Things, or Persons, and declaring the same, is not always evil. And therefore though there be no Exception or Limitation added in the Text it self, yet we are plainly enough taught, both by Reason, and by other Texts of holy Scripture, to understand this universal Prohibition with due Restrictions and Limitations; and seeing all Judging is not in it self unlawful, to understand these Words, as designing to forbid only such Judging as is unlawful; as the Judgment of Falshood, of Pride, of Idleness, of Curiosity, of Harshness and Uncharitableness, and the like.

After this I proceeded, in the second Place,

II. To shew, what Judging of others was hereby meant to be forbidden; *judge not, that ye be not judged*; and two kinds of unlawful and prohibited Judgment, I have already mentioned, viz. 1. False Judgment, i.e. when without any Ground we judge our Neighbour to be guilty of any Fault; or condemn him as a Reprobate, though we know no Ill by him: And, 2. Rash Judgment, i.e. when we judge beyond Evidence, and censure more harshly and severely than we have just Grounds for. But,

3. It was the Design of our Saviour in these Words, to forbid not only false and rash Judgment, but also all needlessly passing or giving our Judgment concerning others. These Words, *judge not*, forbid us to judge at all concerning our Neighbour, unless when either that Place and Office, which the Providence of God has fixed us in, obliges us to it, or when some good and charitable Design puts us upon it. These Words, *judge not*, forbid in general that Proneness and Aptness which there is in almost all Men to judge and condemn others; proceeding either from Pride and Affection of superiority, or from Malice and Hatred, or from some other vicious and corrupt Principle. *Who art thou that judgest another*, says the Apostle? *Jam. iv. 12.* It is as if he had said; shew thy Warrant and Authority to execute this Office, or else thy assuming it is an unjust Usurpation. For to judge is manifestly an Act of Authority, of Jurisdiction and Power. He only can warrantably judge of another Man's Behaviour, who has the Charge of him, the Inspection over him, and who has Power to correct and punish him when he does amiss: But this no Man hath over his Equals, and much less over his Superiors. And yet Men are generally as apt to pass their Censures on such as are in no respect subject to them, nay on such as are placed in Authority over them, their Parents, their Governors, their Masters, and the like, as they are upon those who are under their Care and Charge. By which, they do not only usurp an Authority which they have no Right to, but they likewise assume an Office which they are by no means qualified to discharge; they judge and speak evil of Things which they understand not; they censure and blame such Administrations of their Governors and Superiors, as, for any thing they know, may deserve Commendation rather than Blame.

But however, whether they judge right or wrong, their judging alone is a Fault; for when they judge their Superiors, they assume an Authority which is not given them; and whenever they pass Judgment concerning others without Warrant and Authority, they needlessly busy and incumber themselves with other Men's Concerns, to the great Neglect of their own Business.

4. Even in those Cases wherein we are allowed to make a Judgment in our own Minds, concerning the Persons and Actions of other Men; as, in notorious Cases, when both the Action and the Crime of it are evident, or in any other of the Cases formerly mentioned; even in these Cases, I say, this Precept of our Saviour, *judge not*, may reasonably be understood as designed to forbid the needlessly declaring our Judgment thereof to others: And then we may be said to declare our Judgment needlessly, when we are not obliged to do it, either by Justice or Charity to our selves or others.

Thus, for Instance, if I see my Neighbour committing any Sin, I cannot but judge him guilty of it in my Mind; I cannot but believe my self, what I see with my own Eyes; and what I know to be a Sin, I cannot but condemn as such. But nevertheless, it is inconsistent with that Love and Charity which I ought to bear to him, whom I am commanded to love as my self, without good Reason moving me to it, forthwith to publish his Crime, to blaze abroad his Shame, and procure him to be judged and condemned by the rest of his Neighbours; for *Charity*, as the Apostle says, *covereth a*

multitude of Sins. We always endeavour, as much as we can to hide and conceal the Faults of those whom we love; so that a Proneness and Delight to publish and divulge all the ill Things which we know of our Neighbours, must needs proceed from want of Charity and Goodwill towards them. And therefore, as here we are forbidden to judge, so we are frequently in other Places of holy Scripture forbidden to *Speak Evil* of others; and that this was meant to be here forbidden by our *Saviour*, is evident from *James* iv. 11, 12. where the *Apostle* repeating this Precept of our *Saviour* against judging, expresses it by *speaking evil* of others: *Speak not evil, says he, one of another, Brethren; for he that speaketh evil of his Brother, and judgeth his Brother, speaketh evil of the Law, and judgeth the Law; but if thou judge the Law, thou art not a Doer of the Law, but a Judge. There is one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?*

5. Lastly; another Thing meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour* in this Precept, *Judge not*; is a needless and over-curious Inquisitiveness into the Faults of others. It is true indeed, this is not properly judging, but it is necessarily preparatory thereto, and it is what a Proneness and Aptness to judge others does naturally put us upon; for he, who is prone and disposed to censure and find fault, cannot forbear to desire Matter of Censure, and to wish to see somewhat that he may find Fault with. So that the same uncharitable Temper which disposes us to judge harshly and severely of our Neighbours, must need also dispose us to pry into, and examine their Behaviour more narrowly than belongs to us to do, if we have no Authority or Jurisdiction over them. And it is indeed our judging and censuring such Actions of our Neighbours as these, which was here chiefly designed to be forbidden. For what offers it self to our Senses, we cannot but take notice of; and if it be evidently bad, we cannot but censure it as an ill Thing: But we do then most of all transgress this Precept, when we search out Matter for Censure; when the open Behaviour of our Neighbour not affording us Ground enough to condemn him, we search and pry into all his secret Faults, and set our selves to find out somewhat more, that we may tax and censure him for: When rather than not blame him for somewhat, we examine so narrowly into his Life, as not to overlook the least Miscarriage; and pry into him so nearly and exactly, as that if there be but the least Mote in his Eye, we shall be sure to discover it.

Such Inquisitiveness as this being, I say, the necessary Consequence of a Proneness to judge and censure others, it may well be supposed that the Prohibition of this was meant to be comprehended under the Prohibition of Judging: And so our *Saviour* himself seems to expound his Meaning in the Words following the Text, where he immediately adds these Words; *and why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?* By which Words immediately subjoined to this Prohibition of Judging, it seems that our applying our selves to scan, and sift into, and find out all the little Faults and Failings of others, is either a Part, or such a necessary and never-failing Concomitant of that Judging others, which he here forbids, as that it must needs be included under the same Prohibition.

Thus I have shewn you, what Judging was not, and what Judging was meant to be forbidden by our *Saviour*, in this general Prohibition, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

I proceed now to the third Thing proposed, which was,

III. To endeavour to dissuade you from the Practice of such judging as is here forbidden, by some general Arguments and Considerations, shewing both the Sinfulness, and the Folly thereof.

1. I shall represent to you the Sinfulness of it; and here it may be considered,

(1.) That this Precept of our Saviour, *Judge not*, is a Precept very easy to be observed; for which Reason the Transgression thereof is a greater Sin; than if it had been a Command which we could not have kept without great Difficulty. For what Precept can be easier than this is? A Precept which enjoins us no Labour; which puts us to no Cost; which lays upon us no Burthen; which only commands us to be easy and quiet; not to meddle with things which do not belong to us; not to thrust our selves into Business which is none of ours? Had indeed the quite contrary to this been commanded; had we been bidden to pry into and examine, to judge and pass Sentence upon, all the Actions of our Neighbour, we might then very justly have complained of the troublesome Office which we were put into; and with much better Reason might we then have declined the taking it upon us: But when we are only bid to be quiet and silent, the Transgression of such an easy Command of God as this is a Sin capable of no Excuse.

(2.) It may be considered farther, that the Practice of judging and censuring those, who are not put into Subjection under us, is an Usurpation on God's Right. For to him Judgment and Vengeance do most properly belong: They so belong to him, that no other Person can either pass Judgment, or inflict Punishment, on any of his Fellow-Creatures, unless he hath received Commission from God to do it. *Who art thou that judgest another Man's Servant?* says the Apostle, *Rom. xiv. 4. To his own Master he standeth or falleth.* And again, ver. 10. *Why dost thou judge thy Brother, or why dost thou set at nought thy Brother; for we shall all stand before the Judgment-Seat of Christ?* Whoever therefore thou art that judgest another without Authority, thou takest too much upon thee; thou invadest God's Office; thou usurpest upon his Right; thou settest thy self in God's Place, and assumest an Honour which is due only to him: Thou art consequently guilty of the highest Arrogance and Presumption; yea, of no less a Crime than High-Treason against the Sovereign Majesty of Heaven and Earth; an Indignity which God cannot but resent most highly, and punish most severely; for he has solemnly declared, that he *will not give his Honour to another.*

(3.) As the Practice of judging and censuring each other is an Act of high Injustice towards God, so it is also towards Men, who by Nature are all equal, and by the Law of their Creation are subject to God only, and to those to whom he delegates a Part of his Authority, and makes his Deputies and Viceroy's here upon Earth. It is therefore most manifestly an unjust Usurpation upon our Neighbour, to meddle in his Affairs, and to draw him under our Jurisdiction, when we have no legal Authority over him; for none hath in himself Authority to judge, but he only who hath Authority to make Laws; *there is one Law-giver*, says the Apostle, *who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?* If therefore we have not Authority to oblige others to obey our Commands, we have no Authority to judge them for their Faults; nor to punish them in their Reputation by blasting their Fame, any more than we have in their Bodies or Goods.

The Practice of judging is likewise unjust, as being most contrary to that golden Rule of Justice of *doing as we would be done unto.* For there is nothing which we take greater Offence at, than when any of our Neighbours take upon them to censure our Actions, or condemn our Persons; when it is our own Case, and we our selves are judged and censured by any other Person, we have always ready at hand that Question put to Moses by the Israelite which had done his Neighbour wrong, *Exod. ii. 14. Who made thee a Prince and a Judge?* Wherefore dost thou meddle in Matters which thou

hast

hast nothing to do with? and what hast thou to do to judge those who are not subject to thy Jurisdiction? And if this Reproof be reasonable, when others take upon them to judge us, it is no less reasonable, when we take upon us to judge them: *For whatsoever we would that Men should do unto us, the same should we do unto them*; as we are taught by our Saviour, at the twelfth Verse of this Chapter.

(4.) The Practice of judging and censuring our Brethren, is also as uncharitable as it is unjust; it argues a most culpable Defect of Love towards them. For whom we love, we are always inclined to favour; we put the best Interpretation we can upon every Thing they say or do. *Charity thinketh no Evil*, as the *Apostle* says, 1 Cor. xiii. 5. Moreover, whom we love, we always endeavour to represent as fair and lovely as we can to others. *Charity beareth all Things*, says the *Apostle*, at the seventh Verse of that Chapter; *καὶ πάντα ὑπομένει*, it covereth or concealeth all Things; i. e. it is very industrious to hide from the Knowledge of others, whatever is bad in the Person beloved. These are most natural Fruits or Effects of Charity; and thus we always express our Love towards our selves; we interpret all our own Actions in the best Sense, we make the fairest Apologies which we can for them: And if they are manifestly culpable, we however strive what we can to extenuate or excuse them; and by all Ways in our Power, endeavour to render our selves as lovely, and as well esteemed as we can possibly do. So that when, on the contrary, we expound our Neighbour's Actions in the worst Sense, when instead of extenuating and excusing his Faults, we load him with the greatest Aggravations, and publish and declare to others that harsh Judgment which we have formed of him in our own Minds, endeavouring thereby to render him as odious and despicable to others, as we have represented him to our selves; this is a most manifest Breach of that Law of Charity, that second great Commandment in the Law, comprehending under it all the Duties which we owe to our Neighbour; *thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*.

Hitherto I have endeavoured to shew the great Sinfulness of this too common Practice of judging and censuring one another.

2. I proceed now very briefly to shew also the great Folly of it. And,

(1.) If there were nothing more in it than only this, that while we busy our selves in prying into the Behaviour of others, and passing our Judgment upon them, we neglected our own Business, as we must needs do; this alone would be Folly enough. For what does it concern us to enquire, what does it profit us to know, what this or the other Neighbour has done amiss? or what Advantage do we reap to our selves, from passing a harsh Sentence against them? And yet while we are busied in these Things which concern us not at all, our precious Time passes away, and our own necessary Business is left undone. For it is a most true Observation, that they who are most concerned about other Men's Lives, are commonly least careful of their own. And it must needs be so, because being so much abroad, they cannot be so much at home as they should be: Directing their Sight to Things at a Distance from them, they must needs overlook Things that are nearer; spending the greatest Part of their Time in prying into and scanning the Behaviour of others, they have not enough left to examine, as they should, their own. And what can be more foolish than this? For he that is truly wise, is wise for himself, as *Solomon* observes, *Prov. ix. 12*. True Wisdom shews it self in being most concerned about Things which are of the greatest and nearest Concern to us. And in Matters relating to this Life, we should account him a foolish Man who was so very officious in doing Business for other Men, though it was in doing them real Kindnesses, as thereby to neglect his own Business, and so suffer himself and his Family to come to

Want; because, as we use to say, *Charity begins at home*; and it is no Charity to do Kindnesses to Strangers, to the very great Prejudice or utter Undoing of our selves, and those whom we are in Justice, as well as Charity, more strongly obliged to provide for, and to take Care of. But the Practice of judging and censuring others is a much greater Instance of Folly than that; for when we spend our Time in sifting out our Neighbour's Faults, we do not design, neither do we really do them any Good, but rather, as I shewed before, we do them great Injury; and yet by doing this we lose that Time which God has given us to fit and prepare our selves for Eternity, and neglect that Business which is of the greatest Concern in the World to us, the Care of our own immortal Souls.

(2.) The Folly of this Practice will farther appear, from the Consideration of the Mischiefs which do thence accrue to our selves. For it is a great Instance of Folly to labour in vain, and to take a great deal of Pains to no good Purpose; but it is a much greater to spend our Time and Pains only in working Mischief to our selves, in procuring our selves to be hated and spoken Evil of by all that know us. And there is nothing which does more certainly produce these evil Effects, than the Practice of rashly judging, and harshly censuring others; nothing doth more excite the Hatred of Men against us than this: Because they look upon it, and that not without Reason, as a certain Argument of our Hatred and Ill-will towards them; and it is as natural to hate those who hate us, as it is to love those who love us. It is not therefore to be expected that they should bear us Good-will, to whom we shew such Hatred and Ill-will; so that the Practice of judging others doth not only provoke, but (considering the corrupt Nature of Man) doth in a manner authorise them to judge us with the like Severity, and to requite us in the same Kind; it seeming but Justice, that he who intends or practises Mischief to others, should suffer the like Mischief himself.

And this deserves the more to be considered, because there is nothing in the World more easy, than for our Neighbours to revenge this Injury in Kind, and to judge and censure us as severely as we did judge and censure them.

And this is the Argument whereby our *Saviour* himself is supposed by some to dissuade from this Practice, here in the Text; *Judge not, that ye be not judged; for, says he, with what Judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what Measure you mete it shall be measured to you again.* That is, you must look to be so dealt with by others, as you deal with them. You cannot reasonably expect Favour from those to whom you shew none. This is an Event which may justly be expected, and which rarely fails to come to pass.

But I suppose the Judgment here meant by our *Saviour* was rather the Judgment of God, than the Judgment of Men; *Judge not, that ye be not judged; i. e.* that ye be not judged by God. And then these Words suggest to us another Consideration, whereby the Folly of this Practice, of rashly and harshly judging others, will more fully appear. Namely,

(3.) Because by this Practice, which is highly injurious to our Neighbour, and of no Benefit or Advantage to our selves, even in this World, but rather the contrary; we justly provoke God to judge us with the same Judgment wherewith we judge others. *Blessed are the Merciful*, says our *Saviour*, *Matth. v. 7.* which Words may be understood of such as are candid and merciful in their Censures of others, as well as of those who are merciful in other respects: *Blessed are the Merciful; for they shall obtain Mercy.* And on the other Side, it is expressly threat-

ened, in *Jam. ii. 13.* that he shall have Judgment without Mercy, that hath shewed no Mercy. This is the righteous Judgment of God, to deal in such manner by us, as we deal by our Brethren. Not that if we judge others rashly, and condemn them without Cause, God also will judge us rashly, and condemn us undeservingly; no, far be this from God; *Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* But the Meaning of that Threatning is, that God will not be favourable in his Judgment of us; that he will be severe with us in what we do amiss; that he will judge us without Mercy, and strictly repay us according to our deserving, in case we are unmerciful and uncharitable in our Censures of our Brethren. And what can be more equal than this? For ought not we to have Pity on our Fellow-Servants, over whom we have no Authority, if we look that our Lord and Master, against whom our Offences are innumerable, should have Pity on us? And if we will shew no Favour to a Man like our selves, to one of our Fellow-Sinners, to one who is in the same Condemnation; how can we deserve Favour? with what Reason can we hope for any? For in condemning him, we condemn our selves, who are guilty of many Sins as well as he; so that there is nothing more needful to condemn us, but only that God should judge us out of our own Mouth. And upon this Ground the Apostle St. Paul argues against, and dissuades from, this Practice, *Rom. ii. 1, 2, 3.* *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O Man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thy self; for thou that judgest, dost the same Things; i. e.* Thou art a Sinner against God no less than he, though perhaps not guilty of just the same Faults. *And thinkest thou this, O Man, that judgest them which do such Things, and dost the same, that thou shalt escape the Judgment of God?*

And these Considerations will, I hope, be sufficient to dissuade you from the Practice here forbidden; *judge not, that ye be not judged.* I proceed now, in the fourth and last Place, very briefly

IV. To propose some Remedies for the Prevention and Cure of this vile Disposition, and too common Practice of judging and censuring one another. And I shall but name them. And,

1. The most sure and effectual Means to prevent all harsh and forbidden judging of others, is to be in Charity with all Men, and to *love our Neighbour as our selves*; which if we do, there will be no Difficulty at all in forbearing to judge harshly of him. For whom we love, we are naturally apt to think and believe well of. Love sees no Faults in the Person beloved; or if they are so plain that they cannot but be seen, it disposes us, however, to extenuate, abate, connive at, and see as little of them as is possible. *Hatred stirreth up Strife, but Love covereth all Sins,* says the *Wise-man, Prov. x. 12.*

2. Therefore, in order to the avoiding that harsh and uncharitable judging of others which is here forbidden, we should do well never to pass any Judgment at all, no, not in our own Minds, so far as we can forbear it; at least, never to declare and tell to others our Judgment, concerning either the Person or the Actions of any Man, between whom and us there hath been any Strife, upon any Account. For he is by no means qualified to be a Judge, but may fairly be excepted against, who is at Enmity with the Person whom he is to judge; because it may well be supposed, that that Prejudice or Aversion, which he has already conceived against him in his Mind, will so bias his Judgment, and so incline

incline him to Harshness and Severity, that he will not examine the Cause fairly, nor judge of it impartially.

And the Reason is the same in private Judgments. Of him, who is our Adversary, it is great Odds that we shall not judge so candidly and impartially, as we ought to do. So that the only sure Means to avoid the Guilt of false or rash Judgment in such a Case, is by wholly declining both to make and to give our Judgment concerning any Person whom we are at Enmity with.

3. In order to the avoiding false and rash Judgment, it is necessary, that even in those Cases wherein we may judge, as in evident and notorious Cases; or wherein we are obliged to judge, as when we have the Charge and Inspection of others committed to us; we should nevertheless be very slow in making our Judgment concerning them. For how clear soever the Case may appear to us at the first Sight, there can be no Harm in taking more Time to examine and consider it, before we pass Sentence: For that which is true to Day, will be as true to Morrow; so that it will be at least as well to delay the declaring our Judgment till then; and by taking so much more Time to consider, we shall often see Cause to give a different Judgment then, from what we should have given now. However, we can hardly ever be sure that we understand the Case fully at the first Sight; and of what we are not sure we understand fully, we ought not to give or declare our Judgment: For *he that answereth a Matter before he heareth it, it is both a Folly and a Shame unto him;* as the *Wise-man* says, *Prov. xviii. 13.*

4. Another most excellent Means to avoid false and rash Judgment is, often calling to Mind the Mistakes which we have already committed, in making or giving our Judgment concerning others. For when we consider that we have often already been deceived in our Judgment, and have many Times, through Rashness and Precipitancy in giving Judgment, condemned those whom afterwards we have seen Cause to acquit, this will make us more cautious in giving Judgment for the future, and persuade us to take more Time to consider Things, and never again to declare our Judgment, till we are very sure that we understand the Case fully.

5. There is nothing that would more effectually cure and prevent false and rash Judgment of others, than a firm Resolution not to make the Lives and Actions of our Neighbours the Subject of our Talk; never to speak what Ill we know of others, unless we are either in Justice or Charity obliged to it; and never to declare our Judgment concerning them, if it be ill, unless we are in Duty bound to declare it; for we should hardly ever care to trouble our selves to make a Judgment concerning others, if when we had made it we were obliged to keep it to our selves.

6. And lastly, Let us frequently and seriously reflect upon our own Faults and Miscarriages, and that will effectually cure us of our Proneness to judge others: For we know our selves a great deal better than we do others; and there is no Man but who, if he seriously examines his own Life, will know more Ill by himself, than he does of any of his Neighbours. And if we are conscious of our own Faults and Imperfections, and as sensible, as we ought to be, of our own Need of the divine Mercy and Forgiveness, we shall not be over-forward to judge and condemn our Neighbours. We shall find our selves Work enough at home, to *pull out the Beam that is in our own Eye*, to correct our own Faults, and to amend our own Lives; and shall have no Time to spare from that, and from the necessary Affairs of Life, needlessly to pry into, to scan, and censure the Misbehaviour of other Men.

Besides, being by a just Sight and Sense of our own manifold Sins, made humble and lowly in our own Conceits, we shall see that it does by no means become us, who are great Criminals our selves, to take upon us to be Judges of others, who perhaps are not so great Sinners as we are; of whom, at least, we do not certainly know so much Ill as we do of our selves. And considering that we our selves must shortly appear before God's Tribunal, to give an Account of our own Actions, and that if he should enter into strict Judgment with us, we should not be able to abide before him, we shall be very shie of passing a harsh and severe Censure upon our Neighbour, lest God should turn the same upon us, as most justly he may, and as we have great Reason to fear he will do.

Judge not, therefore, that ye be not judged; condemn not, that ye be not condemned; for we must all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ; and with the same Measure that we mete withal, it shall be measured to us again.



DIS

DISCOURSE LXXII.

Rules for Judging of others.

MATH. VII. 3, 4, 5.

And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy Brother; let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye; and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye?

Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.



IN the Words immediately foregoing, on which I have formerly discoursed, our *Saviour* had forbidden a Practice which Mankind are generally exceeding prompt to, *viz.* the judging and censuring others; which he had dissuaded from, chiefly, by the Consideration of its exposing those who practise it, to be judged, both by God and Men, with the same Severity wherewith they do judge others; *Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* The Meaning is, first, that they who are severe and unmerciful in their Censures of others, may justly fear, that other Men will be as severe and unmerciful in censuring them; there being seemingly a sort of Equity in it, that a Man should be dealt with as he himself deals with others; there being manifestly no just Cause for any Man to complain, if what he suffers from others be no more than they or others have before suffered from him; and not only so, but, secondly, they who are prone to judge others may likewise justly fear, that God also will judge them without Mercy; and that he will be very severe in marking whatever they do amiss, when they are so rigorous and severe in the Censures which they pass upon their Neighbours; according to that of the *Apostle*, *James iii. 13. He shall have Judgment without Mercy, that hath shewed no Mercy.*

And the Words which I have now read to you, and am at this time to discourse of, do plainly belong to the same Subject; and so may well be understood,

I. As urging another good Argument to dissuade us from judging; and,

II. As prescribing an excellent Means to cure us of this Fault.

I. This may be understood as urging another good Argument to dissuade us from judging; *why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?* Which Argument is taken from our own Incompetency to discharge well this Office; for it is indecent and incongruous for a Man who is himself a Criminal, to take upon him, especially without good Warrant and Authority from his Superiors, to sit in Judgment upon his Fellow-Criminal. And that is the Case of us all, even of the best of us; for we have all great Faults of our own, we are all highly guilty before God, some, it may be, of some Sins and some of others, but all of them capital and damnable: No matter therefore at present which is the greater, or which is the lesser Sinner of the two; for so long as both of them are Sinners, neither of them is fit to be a Judge of the other. For it is not fit that a Thief should sit in Judgment, though upon a Murderer; and much less that a Murderer should sit in Judgment upon a Thief; for they are both Criminals, and the proper Place for both of them is, to stand at the Bar; there let them both do the best they can to clear themselves of the Crimes whereof they are severally accused; but until they can do that, it is a bold Presumption in either of them to offer to sit upon the Bench, and to pass upon the other that Sentence of Death, which he himself has deserved no less than the other, though perhaps not for just the same Crime. And this Argument against judging others is well urged by the *Apostle* in *Rom. xiv. 10.* *Why dost thou judge thy Brother, or why dost thou set at nought thy Brother? we shall all stand before the Judgment-Seat of Christ. i. e.* we are all Criminals, and we must all be judged by *Christ* for our own Faults; and therefore it is not becoming us, who must pass under Judgment our selves, to take upon us to give Judgment upon others.

II. In these Words, our *Saviour* likewise prescribes an excellent Means to cure us of this common Fault of judging others; *viz.* by directing us to look into our selves, and to busy our selves at home in amending what we shall find amiss in our selves; which if we do, we shall have little or no leisure Time to spend in scanning and sifting the Lives and Manners of other Men: Or if we have any Time to spare, and are in Duty obliged to have an Oversight and Inspection over others, and to judge and censure them in order to their Amendment, we shall be then in a better Capacity than we are now, to discharge this Duty faithfully and wisely: *First cast out the Beam that is in thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye. First cast out the Beam that is in thine own Eye;* that ought to be every Man's first and chiefest Care; for every Man is nearer to himself than he is to his Neighbour, and hath a greater Concern in his own Welfare than in any other Man's; and *Charity*, as we use to say, *begins at home.* And in our worldly Concerns we always practise according to this Maxim. In Case of Fire, our first Care is to save our own Persons and Goods, and when that is done, we think it Time enough then to help our Neighbours; and in any other Danger, our first Thoughts always respect our selves, our greatest Concern is to se-

cure

cure our selves, and till that be done, we think our selves under no Obligation to assist in the rescuing others from the same Danger.

And should we take the same Course in our spiritual Concerns, as it is certainly highly reasonable we should do; for the Salvation of our Souls is a Matter of much greater Importance to us, than the Preservation of our Goods, or Care of our Lives; should we, I say, take the same Course in our spiritual Concerns, and make it our first Care to correct our own Faults and Miscarriages, this first Care would so fully employ us, that we should have little Time, and less Mind, to busy our selves in other Men's Matters, farther than our own Duty obliged us to it.

And how good a Preservative this would be to keep us from ever rashly or needlessly judging others, we may learn from that Passage of History which we meet with in *John viii. 3, &c.* where it is said; *The Scribes and Pharisees brought unto Jesus a Woman taken in Adultery, and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, Moses in the Law commanded that such should be stoned, but what sayest thou?* Now this (as the Evangelist observes) they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him; for if he had acquitted her, they would have accused him to their Nation, as one that had broken the Law of Moses by giving Judgment contrary to it; and if he had condemned her, if he had warranted them to execute upon her the Sentence that was given by the Law of Moses against Adultery, they would then have had whereof to accuse him before the Roman Governor, as one that took upon him, without Commission from the Roman Emperor, to whom the Nation of the Jews was then in Subjection, to be a Judge in Matters of Life and Death. Our Saviour therefore did neither of these, he neither acquitted her whose Crime was so notorious, neither did he condemn her to Death, where he had no legal Authority so to do; but he at once defeated the wicked Design which these Men had against himself, and likewise put an effectual Stop to their malicious Prosecution of the Criminal, by only saying, as you may see at the seventh Verse of that Chapter; *he that is without Sin among you, let him first cast a Stone at her*; for these Words of our Lord brought to the Remembrance of every one of them, the Sins, perhaps of the same Kind, it may be of a more heinous Nature, that he himself had been guilty of; the Consequence of which was, that being every one of them convicted by their own Consciences, they went out, one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last, till Jesus and the Criminal were left alone.

And this would be a general Consequence of Men's reflecting, as they ought to do, upon themselves, and examining their own Behaviour; they would see so many, and such great Faults in themselves which needed Amendment, that they would have little time left to pry into the Faults of other Men's Lives; and being convicted by their own Consciences, would quickly discern, that it was a Matter of much greater and nearer Concern to them, to reform their own Lives, than it was to be Judges of other Men's; and so would be easily persuaded at least to let this alone, till that were first done, *i. e.* not to take upon them to judge and censure others, till, after having amended whatever was amiss in themselves, they had more Leisure than they yet had, to look abroad, and were in a better Capacity than they yet were, to reform others.

But this Argument against rash and uncharitable Judgment, and likewise this Preservative against it, I have already spoken somewhat of in my former Discourses on the two foregoing Verses; and therefore shall not now enlarge farther thereupon; but shall confine my present Discourse to these other Points which the Text offers to our Consideration; namely, 1. that they who are prone to judge and censure others are commonly worse Men than

than those whom they censure; *why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is thine own Eye?* 2. That every Man's first and chiefest Care ought to be to spy out and to correct his own Faults; *thou Hypocrite, cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye.* 3. That they especially which take upon them to reprove and correct others for their Faults, ought to be very careful that their own Behaviour be in all Points blameless and unreprieveable. *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye, and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye? Cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.*

1. It is implied in these Words, that they who are prone to judge and censure others, are commonly worse Men than those whom they censure: This is implied in the first Words of the Text; *why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?* For a *Mote* is a little Straw or a small Dust, such as is apt to be blown into the Eye by the Wind, which makes it smart for the present, and hinders the free Use of the Sight for a short While, but is with little Difficulty washed out again, after which the Eye sees as well as it did before: But a *Beam* is a great Piece of Wood, such as if by any chance it should be stricken against the Eye, would not only pain it, would not only hinder the Sight, but is sufficient to dash the Eye quite out, or so to spoil it that it will never see more: When therefore the Faults of those who are judged and censured are here called *Motes*, and the Faults of those who do judge and censure others are likened to a *Beam* in the Eye, it seems as if our *Saviour* designed hereby to signify, that they who are prone to judge and censure others, are, generally speaking, greater Sinners than those whom they pass their Judgment and Censure upon.

And that thus it commonly is will appear, if we consider first, on the one side, what those Faults are which are the common Subjects of Censure and rash Judgment; and secondly, on the other side, what Sins are included and comprehended in rash and uncharitable Judgment: By comparing which together it will appear, as I said, that he who is guilty of rash and uncharitable Judgment, is commonly a worse Man than he who is rashly judged and uncharitably censured by him.

For, first, the Sins included and comprehended in rash and uncharitable Judgment of others, are Pride, Malice, Envy, and the like; Vices of the worst Sort, which argue the worst and vilest Temper of the Mind, and which are naturally productive of the worst Fruits in the outward Life and Conversation: But, on the other side, the Things which are commonly the Subjects of rash Censure, are either no Faults at all, or if they be, they are commonly lesser Sins, either Sins of Ignorance and Weakness, or some small Failings in such Men as are in the main blameless and unreprieveable, or else perhaps some Matters of private Opinion, wherein Men do differ from one another; which one Man is satisfied of the Lawfulness of, and another Man doubts of or disallows, and therefore censures all those as great Sinners who practise the same without Scruple.

No Man was ever more severely censured, than our blessed *Saviour* was by the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; but what was it for? was it for some great Sin? for some notorious Scandal? for some manifest Vice and Immorality in his Practice? No surely; for *in him*, as we are told, there *was no Sin*; but they censured him as guilty of very great Faults, when indeed there was no Fault in him, but only a Mistake in themselves.

Thus they censured him as a Sabbath-breaker, only because he understood the Meaning of the fourth Commandment better than they did; and kept it according to its true Sense and Design, and not according to the ri-

gorous Interpretation which their Superstition had put upon it: They censured him, I say, as a Sabbath-breaker, because he did good upon the Sabbath; whereas they foolishly thought, that the Rest of the Sabbath was instituted merely for Rest's sake. But he understood the Law better than they did; he knew that the Rest of the Sabbath, *i. e.* the ceasing from the ordinary Works and Labours of Life, was enjoined only that Men might be the more at leisure for Works of Devotion and Charity; he knew, *that the Sabbath was made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath*; and that he kept the Day best who did most Good upon it; and that Mercy was more acceptable to God than Sacrifice: Which Saying had they known the Meaning of, *they would not have condemned the Guiltless*, as he says, *Matt. xii. 7.* speaking of this very Matter.

Thus also they censured him as a *Man gluttonous, and a Wine-bibber, and as a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*, *Matt. ii. 19.* the former, only because his Way of Life was free and familiar; the latter, because he declined not the Company of the worst of Men, when there was an Opportunity of doing them Good by his Instruction and Advice. Now these were really no Faults in him; but their Censure of him was grounded only upon their own Mistake, who placed Religion in the Choice of Meats and Drinks, and in abstaining from Things which God had not forbidden; and thought there was not so much Piety and Charity in converting a Sinner from the Error of his Ways, as there was in a supercilious Disdain of his Person, and keeping off at a Distance from him, according to the Example of their Predecessors in the Prophet *Isaiah's* time, who said, *Stand by thy self, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou. Isa. lxi. 5.*

And yet these same *Scribes and Pharisees* censured *St. John Baptist* as a Man that was lunatick, and besides himself; because his Way of Life was of different Sort from our *Saviour's*, because he was very abstemious and reserved; because he lived in the Wilderness, and conversed but little in the World, *Matth. ii. 18. John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, he hath a Devil.*

Another Example we have of this rash censuring and judging others among the *Romans*, to whom *St. Paul* sent his Epistle; *Rom. xiv. 2. One believeth that he may eat all Things; another who is weak eateth Herbs:* And, *ver. 5. One Man esteemeth one Day above another; another esteemeth every Day alike.* Such difference in Opinion there was even among the first *Christians* and in the Churches which the *Apostles* themselves had planted; and had it rested there, and had each Side practised according to their private Opinion, there had been no great Harm in it; for *Meat* (as the same *Apostle* saith) *commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse;* and again; *the Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost:* But they not rightly understanding this, censured and judged those that differed from themselves in these Opinions of small Importance, and who acted accordingly, as very great Sinners; he that made no great difference in Meats judged him who did as weak and superstitious; and he that did make a difference, judged the other as prophane and irreligious; and thus when neither of them were indeed much to blame for their Opinion only, whether it was true or false, nor yet for acting according to their Opinion; both of them became exceeding guilty, by rashly censuring and judging each other.

And thus, I say, it is most commonly; the Matters for which Men are most apt to be judged and censured by others, are either small Faults, such as the wisest and best Men are seldom clear of; or very often, they are only supposed Faults; *i. e.* either such Practices as are indifferent in themselves,

and are judged to be Faults only by those which have not formed a right Judgment of Things in their own Minds; or else they are such Practices as though they be really vicious in those that do them, the Persons judged guilty thereof are not certainly known to have done. For as to Matters which are manifestly sinful, and which any Person does openly allow himself in the Practice of, these are not properly Subjects of Censure or Judgment, but rather of Sight and Knowledge; for it is improper to say, that we judge a Man to be an Adulterer, when his Adultery is notorious and manifest; or that we judge a Man to be a Drunkard, when we and all the Neighbourhood know him to be so; and when he practises his Sin so openly, that none who know him can be ignorant of it: This, I say, is not properly Judgment, but Knowledge; for we then only can be properly said to make a Judgment of a Man, when from what we see in him we argue and infer a Thing which we do not see. The Matters therefore, I say, for which Men are commonly judged and censured by others, being only supposed Faults, *i. e.* such Things as it is not certain they have done, or which if they have done, it is not certain that they did ill in doing them; and, on the other side, the Principles and Causes of rash and uncharitable Judgment being so manifestly evil, it plainly appears, that they who are guilty of rash and uncharitable Judgment, are commonly worse Men than those who are rashly judged, and uncharitably censured by them. *Why beholdest thou the Mote (that small Dust or Straw) that is in thy Brother's Eye, and considerest not the Beam (that much greater Thing) that is in thine own Eye?* Nay, farther,

(2.) If the Things for which we judge and censure others are manifestly evil, and the Men are manifestly guilty thereof, yet it may truly enough be said, in the general, that they are but *Motes*, in Comparison with those greater Sins which are included and comprehended in rash and uncharitable Judgment; because they are such Faults, as the Men who are guilty of them may more easily be brought to a Sight and Sense of, and to Repentance for, than they who are prone to judge and censure others can be, of and for those Faults and Vices of the Mind which dispose them to uncharitable Judgment. And thus our *Saviour* observes, *Matth. xxi. 31.* speaking to the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who were proud and conceited of themselves, and severe Judges and Censurers of others; *Verily I say unto you, that the Publicans and the Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you; for John came unto you in the Way of Righteousness, and ye believed him not, but the Publicans and the Harlots believed him; and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe him.* And he designed the same Thing in that Parable of the *Pharisee* and the *Publican*, which we meet with in *Luke xviii. 9, &c.* He spake this Parable, says the *Evangelist*, unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two Men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a *Pharisee*, and the other a *Publican*; the *Pharisee* stood and prayed thus with himself; *God, I thank thee that I am not as other Men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as this Publican; I fast twice in the Week, I give Tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his Eyes unto Heaven, but smote upon his Breast, saying, God be merciful to me a Sinner. I tell you this Man went down to his House justified rather than the other.* The Meaning of which last Words is not, that an Extortioner, an unjust Man, or an Adulterer, such as the *Publican* is there supposed to be, could be justified by God while he continued in the Practice of those notorious Sins; for *God will not justify the Wicked*; but that such Enormities in Practice are more readily discerned, and are consequently more easy, and more like to be reformed, than Pride and Arrogance, Envy and Malice, Self-conceit and

and Hypocrisy, and such other Vices of the Mind; which, like inward Ulcers in the Body, though of all the most dangerous and deadly, yet lie not so open to be searched and examined into, and cannot be so easily reached by such Medicines as are proper for their Cure, as outward Sores and Maladies may be. And therefore how bad a Man soever he be, who is judged and reprobated by others, though he be really as bad, as the *Pharisee* supposed this *Publican* to be, and though he has not yet repented of those enormous Crimes which he has been guilty of, yet he can hardly be a worse Man than the *Pharisee*; he can hardly be worse than they are, who are prone to judge and reprobate others; *i. e.* who are proud, and envious, and malicious, and highly uncharitable; for if they were not so, they would not take upon them to judge of others without Warrant and Commission so to do; or at least they would be more candid and charitable in their Censures. Or if the vile *Publican* be indeed at present as bad a Man as the conceited and hypocritical *Pharisee*, yet in this respect at least he is the better Man of the two, that he may more easily be convicted of his Sins by the Checks of his own Conscience, and the charitable Reproofs of his Neighbour, than the other can be, and is consequently in a more likely Way of being reformed than the other is. Well therefore might our *Saviour* prescribe to such as are apt to judge and censure others uncharitably, that they should rather spend their Judgments upon themselves, than upon their Neighbours: *Thou Hypocrite, cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye.* And this leads me to the second Point I was to speak to, *viz.*

2. That every Man's first and chiefest Care ought to be, to spy out and to correct his own Faults; *cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye.* And the Reason of this I have already hinted at, *viz.* because every Man is nearer to himself than he is to his Neighbour, and has a greater Interest and Concern in his own well-doing, and well-being, than in any other Man's; and *Charity* should *begin at home*. Nay indeed, true *Charity* will most certainly *begin at home*; for it is not in our Power, if we would ever so fain do it, to love another better than we love our selves, or to desire another's Welfare more than we do our own. And therefore if any Man be very curious in spying out other Men's Faults, and very officious in offering his Help to reform and amend them, and yet at the same time neglects himself; his Zeal to reform others may proceed from Pride and Self-Conceit, or it may be the Fruits of a pragmatistical Temper, which loves to be meddling in other Men's Matters, or of a Desire of Superiority and Authority over others; or the Man may have a worldly Interest and Design carrying on, which he thinks may be best promoted by a Shew of great Zeal for Godliness and Religion, and he may think that a Zeal to reform others may be more seen and talked of, and make a greater Shew and Noise in the World than the greatest Exactness in his own Life and Conversation would do; but it is certain that it is not true *Charity* to the Souls of his Neighbours, which prompts him to it, and puts him upon it. For it is not credible that any Man should do that out of true Love to his Neighbour, which he will not do out of Love to himself; for, whatever he may pretend, all the World will believe that he loves himself better than he does any other Man; and therefore if he does that for his Neighbour which he will not do for himself; they must conclude that he does it not out of Love and Kindness to his Neighbour, but either to gratify his own malicious Humour, or to promote his own worldly Interest. But,

3. As it is every Man's greatest Concern to reform and amend his own Life, to *cast out the Beam out of his own Eye*; so it is in a more especial Manner necessary, that they should, above all Things, be careful to do this, who take upon them to reprove, correct, and reform others. And this was the third Thing, which I said the Text suggests to our Thoughts, particularly in
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the second and third Verses of the Text, *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye, and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye? Thou Hypocrite, cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.*

How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye? How wilt thou say it? i. e. with what Face, or with what Pretence, or what Hope of good Success, dost thou, or canst thou offer thy Help to correct his Faults, when thou thy self hast as great, perhaps much greater Faults of thine own, than those which thou wouldst correct in him?

(1.) *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out thy Mote? i. e. with what Face canst thou say to him these or the like Words? How canst thou, without blushing, pretend to see Faults in him, when thou seest not thine own, which are as great or greater than his; which to all indifferent Persons appear as plain or plainer than his do; at least, which thou thy self knowest, or mayest know, more certainly than thou canst do his? How canst thou then, being convicted by thine own Conscience; how canst thou, without betraying thine own Guilt by thy Looks, offer to reprove or correct thy Brother, who deserves not thy Reproof or Correction more than thou deservest his? As therefore thou wouldst think of him, if he whom thou judgest so ill of should offer to reprove thee, so believe that he now thinks of thee, who takest upon thee to correct him: he cannot but think that the Office thou undertakest is such, as is of all the unfittest for thee to undertake; he cannot but stand amazed, to see Vice so bold in correcting Sin. Consider therefore well those Words of the Apostle, and they will not only make thee blush, but tremble, in Rom. ii. 1, 2, 3. *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O Man, whosoever thou art, that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thy self; for thou that judgest doest the same Things. But we are sure that the Judgment of God is according to Truth, against them which commit such Things. And thinkest thou this, O Man, that judgest them which do such Things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the Judgment of God? But,**

(2.) *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye? i. e. with what Pretence canst thou speak after this Manner? what Reason canst thou offer for thy undertaking this Office? wilt thou own (as it is most probable the Truth is) that thou doest it out of Pride and Arrogance, and Self-Conceit? that thou endeavourest to put him to Shame, that so he and others may think the better of thee? or that thou chusest this as the easiest Way of making some Shew and Appearance of Religion; it being much easier to find Faults in others, than it is to avoid them our selves? These Reasons of thy offering to pull the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye, though it is most likely they are the true Reasons of it, yet are such as, I presume, thou wilt not own: What plausible Reason then canst thou pretend for it? for if thou sayest thou doest it out of a Zeal for God's Honour, it will be obvious to reply, that he who dishonours God himself, as every wicked Man does, of what Sort or Kind soever his Wickedness be, cannot be reasonably supposed to have a true Concern for his Honour: or if thou sayest, which is, I think, the other only plausible Pretence for it, that thou doest it in Discharge of thy own Duty, and out of true Charity to thy Neighbour, the Falseness and Vanity of this Pretence is no less manifest than of the other; for who can believe a Man truly conscientious in the Discharge of one single Duty, when he sees him notoriously negligent in many others? or who can believe that any Man loves his Neighbour more truly and cordially than he loves himself; which yet it must be supposed thou doest, if indeed thy Reproof and Correction of thy Neighbour be the Effect of thy Charity*

Charity to his Soul, while yet thou hast not so much Charity for thine own Soul, as to take any Care, or to be at any Pains to save it from eternal Ruin. Or,

(3.) *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye?* These Words may be thus understood, viz. as if our Saviour had said, *with what Hope of good Success dost thou take upon thee to reprove and correct others for those Faults of which thou thy self art no less guilty than they; or while thou thy self art guilty of any other, as great or greater Sins, than those which thou wouldst reform in them? what good Effect, I say, can it be hoped thy Reproof should have upon them? who will endure a Physician undertaking his Cure, who is himself sick of the same Disease? or what other Answer canst thou expect to thy Reproofs, but such Words as these, who made thee a Judge? Physician, heal thy self; or those Words of the Apostle, Rom. iii. 19, to 24. Thou art confident that thou thy self art a Guide of the Blind, a Light of them that are in Darkness, an Instructor of the Foolish, a Teacher of Babes, which hast a Form of Knowledge and of Truth in the Law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thy self? thou that teachest a Man, should not steal; dost thou steal? thou that sayest, a Man should not commit Adultery; dost thou commit Adultery? thou that abhorrest Idols, dost thou commit Sacrilege? thou that makest thy Boast of the Law, thro breaking the Law dishonourest thou God? For the Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.* And this indeed is the Fruit and Effect, that the justest Reproof or Admonition, out of the Mouth of a Man who is guilty of the same, or has great Faults himself, as those which he corrects in others, is like to have. It not only renders the Reprover himself ridiculous, and more liable to Censure than he would otherwise be, but it reflects also a Reproach upon Religion; it makes the Enemies of God to blaspheme; it opens the Mouths of Atheists to cry down all Religion as Trick and Cheat, as a Form taken up only to keep Fools in Awe, and to serve a Turn.

Thus it appears, that though it be indeed a Matter of the greatest Concern to all, to keep, in all Things, a Conscience void of Offence, both towards God and towards Man, there being no just Ground of rejoicing in our own Minds, or of entertaining a good Confidence towards God, but only the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity we have had our Conversation in the World; yet that it is a Duty more especially incumbent upon them who take upon them to reprove and correct others, to take special Care that their own Behaviour be in all Points blameless and unreprieveable. *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye, and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye?* And this was the third Thing which I noted from the Text.

And from what hath been said on this Head, we may observe, by way of Inference,

1. The strict Obligation which lies on Ministers to shew themselves exemplary in their Life and Behaviour, and to walk so prudently and cautiously that they may not justly be upbraided with any Fault; and that for this Reason, because it is their Duty, a great Part it is of their Office, to instruct others, and, as there is Occasion, either secretly or openly to reprove and rebuke them; but their Instructions will be of little Use, and their Reproofs, how just and seasonable soever, will be all lost and thrown away, or else redound to their own Shame and Reproach, unless they take heed to their Life, as well as to their Doctrine, and are careful to shew themselves, in all Things, *Patterns of good Works*. For the same Reason also,

2. All Magistrates, and Officers of Justice, are bound to shew good Example to all under their Charge; for it is their special Duty, and that for which Governors and Government were ordained by God; to punish all Vice and Wickedness in their Subjects, to be a Terror to evil Doers, and to cut off with the Sword of Justice such as are intolerable for their Violence and Injustice, and will not be persuaded to lead quiet and peaceable Lives, in Godliness and Honesty. But with what Face can Magistrates correct and punish those Vices and Immoralities in their Subjects, of which they themselves do give them Example? how can they, without trembling, make Use of the Sword of Justice wherewith they are intrusted, to cut off the Workers of Iniquity, when they consider that they themselves have done the same Things, and do deserve no less to be cut off; and that that God, who has committed the Use of the Sword to them for a short time, has still reserved the Propriety thereof to himself; that they are as answerable for all their Crimes to him, as their Subjects are to them, and that *there is no Respect of Persons with God*. Again,

3. From hence likewise all Parents, all Masters and Heads of Families, may learn, how strictly they also are, for the same Reason, obliged to behave themselves wisely and unblameably before their Children and Servants. For if they suffer any Wickedness in their Families, which it is in their Power to prevent, the Blame thereof will, in great Measure, lie upon them. An Example of God's Justice, upon which Account you may see, in old *Eli*, 1 Sam. iii. 13. *I have told him*, says God, *that I will judge his House for ever; for the Iniquity which he knoweth, because his Sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*. But how should a Master of a Family restrain his Children or his Servants, from doing vile and wicked Things, while he himself is as vile as they? how can a Father, with a good Face, I had almost said with a good Conscience, rebuke his Son for that Drunkenness or Intemperance, that Swearing or Prophaneness, which he first learned from his Example? or how can a Master be angry with his Servant for cheating him, for his own Advantage, when he himself had before instructed and encouraged him to cheat and defraud others for his Master's Profit? All Reproof is unbecoming out of the Mouth of a wicked Person; and when once a Man debases himself, to do vile and wicked Things in the Presence of his Inferiors, he forthwith loses all that Authority over them which God and Nature had given him. But,

4. Lastly, the Consideration of what hath been said is yet of more general Use; for from hence we may all learn, whatever our Place and Station in the World is, or whatever Relation we bear to others; from hence, I say, we may learn, how necessary it is for us to lead our Lives unblameably and unreprieveably. For it is every Man's Duty, as he has Opportunity, to reprove his Brother, and not to suffer Sin upon him; and by not reproofing others for their Sins, when there is a proper Time and Season for it, we become Partakers with them in their Sins: But no Man can ever reprove another with Authority and Efficacy, while he is liable to have his Reproof turned upon himself, and to have that Blame, whether for the same or for any other Crimes, retorted back upon him, which he throws upon others.

For this, by the Way, must be noted, and with noting it I shall put an End to my Discourse upon these Words; that after all which hath been said now, or in any former Discourse, against judging and censuring others; nothing which hath been said is to be construed as if it were a Sin to reprove others, as well our Equals as our Inferiors; nay, and if Need be, and a proper Opportunity be offered, our Superiors too. So far is this from being a Sin, that it is a necessary and indispensable Duty, and oftentimes

oftentimes the only Method we can take to avoid being accessary to those Sins of others which we have Knowledge of. It was not therefore our Saviour's Design, in this Prohibition of uncharitable judging, to discourage the most charitable and Christian Duty of Reproof; but what he meant was to put us into the best Method of discharging it with Credit and Authority, and good Success; and this we shall do, if we observe the Direction which he gives in the last Verse of the Text: *First cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.*



DIS

DISCOURSE. LXXIII.

Cautions requisite in Reproving.



MATTH. VII. 6.

Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.



OUR Saviour, in the five foregoing Verses of this Chapter, had been treating of rash and uncharitable judging and censuring others: This he did, in the former Part of the first Verse, universally prohibit, *judge not*; and in the latter part of that, and in the following Verses, he first enforced his Prohibition of judging by two Arguments: The first taken from the Consideration of the Danger to which rash and uncharitable Judgment exposes those who are guilty of it, of being themselves severely judged both by God and Men; *judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*: The other, from our Incompetency to be Judges of others, who are our selves guilty before God, and must our selves undergo his Judgment; *why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?* And after this, he had prescribed, both as a necessary Duty in it self, and also as a good Means or Remedy to cure our Proneness to judge others, that we should examine well our own Behaviour, make just Reflections upon our own Life, and use our utmost Endeavour to amend and reform that; the Consequence of which will be, that, first, we shall have little Time or Leisure left to trouble our selves about other Mens Lives, farther than our own Duty obliges us to it: And, secondly, that having first reformed our selves, we shall be in a better Capacity to discern what Faults there are in our Brother which need Amendment, and by what Means we may best be helpful to him in amending the same: *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye, and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye? Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.*

And

And that Advice of our Saviour's, subjoined to his universal Prohibition of rash and uncharitable judging; that Advice, I say, of our Saviour's, *first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye*, together with the Reason whereby it is enforced, *then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye*, gave me occasion to note, as I did, at the Conclusion of my Discourse the last Time upon those Words; that tho' it be a Sin to judge and censure our Brother rashly or uncharitably, it is not a Sin to endeavour his Reformation and Amendment. Charity indeed restrains us from judging our Brother guilty of those Sins which we do not see, or which we are not fully assured he has been guilty of: Charity also restrains us from magnifying and aggravating those Faults which we do see, or are fully assured of; and what Faults soever he hath done, and how many and great soever they be, Charity will not permit us to judge and reprobate him, or to pass Sentence of Condemnation upon him; whom, as being our Brother, we should rather heartily commend to the Grace and Favour of Almighty God, earnestly praying that he may obtain Repentance and Pardon. But Charity does not oblige us not to see the Faults which our Brother hath committed, if they be open and manifest: It does not oblige us, when we do see them, to concern our selves no farther about them; but rather, it obliges us to do what we can to convince him of the Danger he is in, while he continues in his Sin; to persuade him to Repentance, and to assist him in it. This is clearly intimated in those Words of our Saviour, *then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye*; it is plainly intimated, I say, in those Words, that we may, if we are in a Capacity of doing it, endeavour to pull the Mote out of our Brother's Eye; i. e. to amend and reform even the least Miscarriages which we happen to spy out in the Life and Conversation of our Brother, and much rather, that we may, as the Apostle expresses it, *pull out of the Fire those who are in imminent Danger of being consumed by it*; i. e. use our utmost Endeavour to bring to a Sight and Sense of their Sin and Danger, such as live in a Course of notorious and scandalous Sin, of whom, if they should persist and die in the wicked Course they are in, we could not entertain any good Hope.

But then, that we may be able to discharge well this Duty of the greatest Charity to the Souls of others, our Saviour here gives us two Cautions; one respecting our selves, the other those whom we undertake the Reformation of.

The Caution respecting our selves, is, that before we undertake to reform others, we should be very careful that our own Life and Conversation be unblameable and unproveable; and this Caution he gives in the Verse before the Text, on which I discoursed the last Time; *thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye*. In which Words it is implied,

1. That the greatest Shew and Appearance of Zeal to reform and amend others, while yet at the same Time we neglect our selves, or allow our selves in the Practice of any known Sin, is not the Effect of true Religion; i. e. either of Piety towards God, or of Charity towards our Neighbour; but is mere Dissimulation and Hypocrisy, a Form of Godliness, without the Power of it: *Thou Hypocrite, cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye*. And,

2. That till we have well reformed our selves, we are not like to undertake the Reformation of others to any good Purpose; but that when we have first amended all which was amiss in our selves, we shall be then in a good Capacity to undertake the Reformation of others, and may undertake it with good Hope of Success; *then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye*.

The other Caution here given us, and which respects those whom we undertake the Reformation of, is in the Words of the Text, of which I am now to discourse; *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.*

The Meaning of which Words, if we understand them in the most restrained Sense, in that Sense which, according to the Connexion that is between them and the foregoing Words, seems to be primarily intended, is this; that though it be a general Duty of Charity to pull out the Mote out of our Brother's Eye, that is, to endeavour his Reformation and Amendment; we are not, however, obliged to bestow this Labour of Love on those upon whom we are satisfied it will do no Good; especially, if their Temper be such that we may very reasonably think that our Endeavours to reform them will, not only do them no Good, but provoke them to do us Harm; *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.* Or,

2. We may understand the Words in a somewhat larger Sense, viz. as meaning, by the mention of this one Instance of Prudence in our Reproof or Admonition of an offending Brother, to prescribe the general Use of Prudence in this Matter; and that we should always take care so to suit those Methods which we take to reform others, to the Temper and Disposition of those whom we seek to reform, as that, if it be possible, we may effect their Reformation; because otherwise, i. e. if we have not a prudent Consideration of their Tempers and Dispositions, the Labour which we bestow in endeavouring to correct their Faults, may have a quite contrary Effect to what we hoped; i. e. may harden them in their Sin, instead of bringing them to Repentance; and may likewise provoke them to treat us as their Enemies, while they interpret our indiscreet Zeal to reform them as an Expression of our Hatred and Enmity to them. Or,

3. And lastly, The Words of the Text being a general proverbial Expression, cited indeed by our Saviour upon a particular Occasion, but not by him expressly applied, much less appropriated thereto; For the Application thereof, to the Purpose for which he used it, being so very easy, it was enough for him only to mention the Proverb it self, leaving it to his Hearers to make the Application; *Give not that which is holy unto Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine.* The Advice, I say, being given only in a general proverbial Expression, and the Nature of Proverbs being generally such, that they may be fitly used upon several Occasions, and aptly applied to more Purposes than one; it is reasonable to understand the Words of the Text in a still larger Sense; viz. as designed to order and command us to have a like prudent Consideration of the Temper and Disposition of the Persons we have to deal with, in all other Matters and Cases wherein Religion is concerned, as well as in the Case of Reproof or Correction of an offending Brother; and so to order our Conversation when we happen to be in Company, or to have to deal with such Men as are here meant, by Dogs, and Swine, as neither to expose Religion to Contempt, nor our selves to needless Dangers and Persecutions. *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.*

I shall briefly speak to the Words taken in each of these three Senses.

I. Then; *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine.* The strict Meaning of these Words, (if we understand them in the most restrained Sense, in that Sense which, according to the Connexion

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nexion that is between them and the foregoing Words, seems to be primarily intended,) I told you, is this; that though it be a general Duty of Charity, to pull out the Mote out of our Brother's Eye, that is, to endeavour his Reformation and Amendment; we are not, however, obliged to bestow this Labour of Love upon those Men, on whom we are satisfied it will do no Good; especially if their Tempers are such, that we may not only reasonably despair of their Recovery, but likewise justly fear that our Endeavours to reform them will provoke them to do us Hurt; *lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.*

This, I say, seems to be the prime Meaning of the Words; for our Saviour, in the Words just before, had not only granted that we may, so far as our Abilities extends, endeavour to reform the Lives and Manners of other Men, as well as our own; but had prescribed an excellent Means to put us into the best Capacity of doing it with good Success; *viz. by beginning first with our selves; Cast out first the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.* And then it follows immediately, *give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine.*

It is plain, therefore, (supposing these Words to belong to the same Subject which had been just before spoken of,) that the *holy Thing* which we are not to give unto the *Dogs*, and the *Pearls* which we are not to cast before *Swine*, are good Advice, wholesome Admonition, friendly Reproof, or whatever other Means are proper to be taken and used by us, in order to the reforming our Brother. It only remains then that we enquire, who are the *Swine* before whom we are not to cast these *Pearls*, and who are the *Dogs* to whom we are not to give these *holy Things*; because if we do the former, they will *trample the Pearls under their Feet*; and if we do the latter, *the Dogs will turn again and rent us.* And,

1. By the *Swine*, before whom we are not to cast these *Pearls*, it is most obvious to understand those Men, who, as Swine, whose Nature it is to delight to wallow in the Mire, and who have no Understanding or Apprehension of any Thing which is better or more excellent than that filthy Mire which they wallow in; those Men, I say, who, in this respect like Swine, are led Captive by their Lusts, and can be made to have no Sense or Relish of any Pleasure, but such as is brutish and sensual; who, by a long Custom of sinning, have made it to become their Nature, and by the open and notorious Wickedness of their Lives, have their Modesty quite worn off, and their *Consciences seared*, as it were *with an hot Iron.* On such as these we need not bestow any Pains in advising, admonishing, or reprehending them, because all the Pains we can bestow will be to no Purpose; for Swine will be Swine, and there is no Remedy for it. The proper Method to be taken with such as these, if they be not in the Church, is to neglect them: or if they are in the Church, *i.e.* do make an outward Profession of the Christian Faith, and have been admitted within the Pale of the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism; the best Course to be taken with them, for their Amendment, if their Amendment be possible, or, if it be not, then to hinder the Infection from proceeding farther, is to exercise the Discipline of the Church upon them, and to cast them out of the Church as rotten Members, by the Sentence of Excommunication. Or if this Piece of ancient Discipline cannot be duly exercised, as it were much to be wished it could be; then to note such Men, and to have no Company with them, that so both they may be ashamed, if they be not quite past Shame, of those evil Deeds which they see make them unfit for the Company and Conversation of the wise and sober Part of Mankind; and others, who have an Inclination to follow the same evil Courses, may be deterred and kept back from doing it, by the Consideration

sideration of that Shame and Reproach which it will bring upon them. And to this Purpose the *Apostle* gives this Advice to the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. v. 11. *I have written unto you not to keep Company; if any Man that is called a Brother be a Fornicator, or Covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat; i. e.* at least, if he was notorious for these Sins, if he practised them openly, and without Shame, and was deaf to all Admonition and good Advice: After this, the proper Course to be taken with such an one, was to cast him out of the Church; and, till that was done, to shun his Company, and have no Conversation or Dealing with him. And to the same Purpose our *Saviour* directs, in *Matth.* xviii. 17. that if any Man continued obstinate and incorrigible, after all fit Methods had been used to reclaim him, both by private Reproof and publick Admonition, we should concern our selves no farther about him, unless it were to avoid his Company. *If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an Heathen Man, and a Publican.* Such obstinate and hardened Sinners may perhaps, being delivered up unto Satan, (as the *Apostle* speaks of *Hymenæus* and *Alexander*, 1 Tim. i. 20. whom he had excommunicated,) learn not to blaspheme: Or though their Consciences at present are hard and callous, yet they may hereafter be softened by Affliction; or though at present they are so stupid and lethargical as to be insensible of any thing which is spoken or done to them, they may yet, some Time hence, be roused and awakened by a heavy Judgment of God; and whenever they shall seem capable of hearing Reason, it will be proper then to try to convince them of the Folly and Danger of their Sin, and to bring them to Repentance: But till then our Labour will be lost upon them, and we had better not throw away that Pains upon them which may be better bestowed elsewhere. While they continue Swine, they will do as Swine do, they will trample under their Feet the most precious and valuable Things, while at the same Time they suck in, and snuff up, the nasty Mire which they wallow in, with Greediness and Delight. *Cast not your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet.* And,

2. By those *Dogs*, to whom we are not to give holy Things, it is likewise very obvious to understand, such Men as are of a fierce and fiery Disposition, and who cannot bear with any Patience the least Thing which they account a Slight or Disrespect, and are withal so wedded to their Lusts, and so conceited of the Wisdom of their own Ways, that they reckon those their greatest Enemies who plainly tell them the Truth; and as they account them, so they deal with them, grinning and snarling, like Dogs, at any who give them good Advice; and if that will not make them leave, then falling upon them with Violence, endeavouring to tear and rend them, and stirring up, and setting on others to persecute and destroy them.

Such Dogs were, for the most part, the unbelieving *Jews* in our *Saviour's* and his *Apostles* Times, who are therefore sometimes in Scripture called *Dogs*, *Phil.* iii. 2. for their Lives were filthy and impure, and therefore they would not endure sound Doctrine, *Rev.* xxii. 15. And they not only rejected the Gospel themselves, killing the Lord *Jesus*, and their own *Prophets*, and persecuting the *Apostles*, 1 Thess. ii. 15. but they likewise forbade them to speak to the *Gentiles*, that they might be saved, to fill up their Sins away. And whenever the *Apostles* had any where preached to the *Gentiles* with good Success, the *Jews* always stirred up the Magistrates and the People against them, persecuting them from City to City, and permitting them no where to abide quietly. Several Instances of which are noted by St. *Luke*, in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Thus it was at *Antioch*, *Acts* xiii. 50. when many *Gentiles* had been converted by the Preaching of St. *Paul*, the *Jews* stirred up the devout and honourable Women, and the chief Men of the City,

and raised Persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their Coasts. Thus also it was at Iconium, whither they next went, *Acts* xiv. 2. When the Apostles had so spake in the Synagogue, that a great Multitude both of the Jews, and also of the Gentiles, believed; the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their Minds evil affected towards the Brethren. And the same happened again at Lystra, the next Place they went to, as you may see at the nineteenth Verse of that Chapter: There came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the People to stone Paul: And afterwards, at Thessalonica, *Acts* xvii. 5. where it is said, that many believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great Multitude, and of the chief Women not a few; but the Jews which believed not, moved with Envy, took unto them certain lewd Fellows of the baser Sort, and gathered a Company, and set all the City on an Uproar. And many other Instances there are, in that History, of the Rage and Malice of the Jews against the Apostles, for no other Reason, but only because their Doctrine was too pure and spiritual to be relished or entertained by such a carnal, sensual, and worldly People as they were.

Thus did they truly resemble the Dogs here spoken of, who understanding not the Value and Excellency of holy Things, not only refuse to receive them when offered, but are enraged at those who offer them. And therefore, according to the Direction here given by our Saviour, *give not that which is holy unto the Dogs*: So the Apostles practised: They first indeed offered the Words of Life to the Jews in every Place where they came, but finding how perverse and obstinate, and how fierce and furious they generally were, they quickly gave them over, and directed their Discourse to others who were in better Disposition to receive it. Thus, *Acts* xiii. 45, 46. When the Jews saw the Multitudes, they were filled with Envy, and spake against those Things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming; then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge your selves unworthy of everlasting Life, lo we turn to the Gentiles. And thus again, *Acts* xviii. 6. when the Jews opposed themselves, and blasphemed, Paul shook his Raiment, and said unto them, Your Blood be upon your own Heads; I am clean, from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

And such as the Jews generally were, in the Apostles Times, deservedly called Dogs, because they had no Relish of that heavenly Doctrine which was preached by the Apostles, and were violently enraged against those who endeavoured to convince them of their Errors, and to bring them to Repentance; such are, at all Times, Men of the same corrupt Minds, and fierce and furious Temper which they were of; who in Scripture are often expressed by the Name of Scorners: Upon such Men, while they continue of that Temper, all good Advice or Reproof will be thrown away; and therefore it is to no Purpose to give it. Such, the more Pains we take to reform them, will be but the more furious and enraged against us; they will but turn again, and rent us, for offering them that which of all Things they have the greatest Aversion to; and therefore it is the wisest Way to let them alone to themselves, to gnaw their Bones, and to swallow up again their own Vomit; for Dogs they are, and as Dogs they will do. And thus it was observed by Solomon long before, *Prov.* xxiii. 9. *Speak not in the Ears of a Fool, for he will despise the Wisdom of thy Words.* And again, *Prov.* ix. 7, 8. *He that reproveth a Scorer, getteth himself Shame, and he that rebuketh a wicked Man, getteth himself a Blot. Reprove not a Scorer, lest he hate thee.*

But here now perhaps it will be asked, how the Caution here given us, *not to give that which is holy unto the Dogs, nor to cast our Pearls before Swine*, if it be understood as meant of Reproof and good Advice, not to be given to such as are not capable of receiving it; is consistent with some other Precepts in holy Scripture, which seem to enjoin the contrary; such as that given to *Timothy*, by *St. Paul*, in *2 Tim. ii. 25. In Meekness instruct those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the Acknowledgment of the Truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the Snare of the Devil, who are taken Captive by him at his Will.*

For by this Precept it should seem, that we ought never to despair of any Man's Recovery, nor consequently ever give over our Endeavours to reform him; for who can be worse, or less likely to be wrought upon, than such as the *Apostle* there describes, who were entangled in the Snare of the Devil, who were *taken Captive by him at his Will*; and not only so, but who did also set themselves to oppose the Truth, and any good Advice or sober Admonition which could be given them? And yet these the *Apostle* directs *Timothy* to *instruct with all Meekness, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the Acknowledgment of the Truth.* The *Apostles* indeed, who, with diverse other miraculous Gifts, had also that of discerning Spirits, *1 Cor. xii. 10.* and were often made acquainted, by special Revelation, with the inward Tempers and Dispositions of those whom they preached to, *Acts xxii. 18.* had Reason not to lose Time with those, upon whom they certainly knew before-hand all their Labour would be lost; but we, who have not this Knowledge, should believe and hope the best of every Man, and so make it our Business, as *St. Paul* exhorts *Timothy*, *2 Tim. iv. 2. to be instant in Season and out of Season, and to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all Long-suffering*; according to that general Rule of Prudence, given by the *Wise-man*, *Eccles. xi. 6.* which it is as reasonable to observe in this, as in other Cases; *In the Morning sow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine Hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

And thus much indeed must be granted, that whereas if we knew before-hand what would be the Success of our Advice or Reproof, we should not need ever to give it to such as we were assured would not receive it. Now that we do not know this before-hand, we ought to hope the best, and, according to the Direction before cited, should *reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all Long-suffering*; i. e. it is not reasonable that we should give over our Endeavour to reform our Brother, only because it has been once, or twice, or thrice successful; for the same Admonition which has availed nothing at one Time, may avail much at another. We are not therefore, I say, to presume that any Man's Case is desperate, till after we have made long and frequent Trial of him; and we are also to make a Difference between those who will hear Advice, though they do not follow it; and those who reject, with Scorn and Disdain, whatever is said to them that is sober and serious: Between those who will take Reproof, tho' they are not yet reformed by it, and perhaps never will; and those who, if you offer to reprove them for any thing, tho' never so deservedly, have no Patience to bear it, but immediately fly in the Face of their Reprover, and return Hatred to him, in all the worst Expressions of it, for his great good Will to them. And those of the first sort, i. e. who will hear Advice, and who will take Reproof, are not to be neglected or given over, but are to be admonished with all Meekness and Long-suffering, tho' they shew, as yet, no Signs of real Amendment: But as for those of the latter Sort, who receive whatever is said to them with Scorn and Disdain, who declare themselves resolved not to alter their wicked Course, and seem bent upon doing all the Mischief they can to those who
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express the greatest Kindness to them; such as these may well be given over as desperate, and it is but a Mispend of Time, and a Loss of Labour, to attempt their Reformation, while they continue of this refractory, incorrigible, and furious Temper. To bestow good Advice, or grave Reproof, upon such as these, is no better, nor to any more purpose, than to cast Pearls before Swine, who, knowing not their Worth, will tread them under their Feet; or than to give that which is holy unto the Dogs, who finding it not such a Thing as they expected, will be enraged by the Disappointment, and turn back, and furiously fly upon and tear the Person who threw it to them. And so much may serve to have been spoken of the Words taken in their prime Meaning, viz. as directing us to have some Consideration of the Nature and Temper of the Persons whom we endeavour to reform, and not to bestow our Labour where there is no Hope of Success.

But I noted farther, in the second Place,

II. That we may understand the Words in a somewhat larger Sense, viz. as designing, by the Mention of this one Instance of Prudence in our Reproof or Admonition of an offending Brother, to prescribe the general Use of Prudence in this Matter; and that we should always take care so to suit those Methods which we take to reform others, to the Temper and Disposition of those whom we seek to reform, as that, if it be possible, we may effect their Reformation; because otherwise, i. e. if we have not a prudent Consideration of their Tempers and Dispositions, the Labour which we bestow in endeavouring to correct their Faults, may have a quite contrary Effect to what we hoped, may harden them in their Sin, instead of bringing them to Repentance; and may likewise provoke them to treat us as their Enemies, while they interpret our indiscreet Zeal to reform them, as an Instance and Expression of our Hatred and Enmity to them.

It is good to be zealously affected always in a good Thing, as the Apostle says; and there is nothing which in Reason we ought to be more zealous for, next to the Reformation of our own selves, than to reform, so far as lies in us, the Lives and Manners of other Men. But then we ought to take Care that our Zeal do not out-run our Discretion, and that we choose such Means for the Attainment of the good End we aim at, as are most proper and likely to effect it; particularly, for to mention all the Rules of Prudence and Discretion proper to be observed in the Reproof or Correction of others, would be Matter enough for a whole Discourse; I shall at present mention only this one, which the Words of the Text do readily suggest to us, viz. that as we should not give holy Things to Dogs, nor cast Pearls before Swine; so by the same Reason we should not use as Swine, nor treat as Dogs, those Men, who, tho' Sinners, yet are not Sinners to such a degree, as that they may justly be called Swine, or Dogs.

I mean this: We should not treat a young, a yet modest Sinner, in such a manner as we would do an old and incorrigible Offender; but at the same Time that we seek to reform him, we should have a due Regard to his good Name and Reputation, and endeavour, by all means, to preserve in him that Sense and Fear of Shame which he has yet upon him: And the Way to preserve in him those Remains of Modesty and Shamefacedness which are still left, is not to put him to Shame, if it can possibly be avoided; nor to make his Crime more publick by our Reproof or Admonition, or by any other Method that we take to reform him, than it was in its first Commission. Those indeed who sin openly, are to be openly reprov'd and admonish'd; and those who are profligate and shameless, should be publicly punished for an Example and Terror to others, according to the Apostle's Direction, 1 Tim. v. 20. *Them that sin, i. e. who are scandalous and notorious for their sinful*

Life, rebuke before all, that others also may fear; and indeed, the Correction or Punishment of a hardened Sinner, seldom serves for any other Purpose, but only for Example and Terror to others; for there is little Hope that he himself will be bettered by it, who, if he had not been incorrigible before, would hardly ever have sinned himself, as he has done, past all Shame: And now that he is grown shameless, is in a much more hopeless and desperate Estate than ever he was before. But the Case is otherwise with those who are young Beginners: Of these, therefore, as St. Jude speaks, *Jude 22. we should have Compassion, making a Difference.* And as the End that is proposed in reprovng such, is different from that which is designed in the Punishment of obstinate and hardened Sinners, so the Means whereby it must be attained is different from that which is used, when the Punishment of one Man is chiefly designed for Example to others, *that others also may fear.* For should the same Course be taken with a young Beginner, that is proper to be taken with an old and shameless Offender; should he, for his first or second Offence, which perhaps were committed secretly, have a publick Note, or Mark of Infamy, set upon him, the Means which are taken to correct him would probably do more towards the confirming and hardening him in his Wickedness, than even a long Continuance in the same Wickedness would have done: For the most desperate Condition of a Sinner, is when he becomes shameless; and a Man naturally becomes shameless, by being put to open Shame. So that this is a Course never to be taken with any but such as are past Shame already. But the proper Method to be observed by those who undertake the Reformation of others, out of a true Zeal for God and Goodness, and a hearty Love and Charity to the Souls of their Brethren, is that which is prescribed by our Saviour himself, in *Matth. xviii. 15, &c. If thy Brother shall trespass against thee, i. e. if he shall be an Offence or Scandal to thee by any notorious Act of Sin, go and tell him his Fault between thee and him alone, i. e. admonish him privately, and as privately as thou canst, of his Fault; this is the likeliest Method to reclaim him, while as yet he is modest and shamefaced, while as yet his Conscience is soft and tender; and, says our Saviour, if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother.* And then it follows, *but if he will not hear, i. e. if after this thy private Admonition of him, he still continues in the Practice of the same Sin, thou mayest admonish him more publickly, but still with a tender Regard to his Modesty, and so as not to shame him more than is absolutely necessary; then, says our Saviour, take with thee one or two more, that in the Mouth of two or three Witnesses every Word may be established:* For it is likely enough, that when two or three join together in this private Reproof of an offending Brother, their Reproof may be more effectual than a single Man's was. And then it follows, *and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church, i. e. if he still continues in the same Sin, thou mayest then acquaint the Elders and Governors of the Church with it, who may admonish him with more Authority, and consequently more Efficacy, than any private Members of it could do; and to them it belongs properly to judge of what Nature his Crime is, and what Course is fit to be taken with him, either for his Reformation, if he be corrigible, or for his Punishment, if he be not.* And then it follows, in the last Place, *but if he will neglect to hear the Church, i. e. if he be so hardened in his Wickedness, as not to be reformed even by publick Admonitions, or Church-Censures, then let him be unto thee as an Heathen Man and a Publican; i. e. thou mayest then give over the Care of him, thou needest not any more admonish him as a Brother; for he then shews himself to be such an one as the Text designs by Swine and Dogs, before whom it is imptoper to cast Pearls and holy Things.*

This Method here prescribed by our *Saviour*, if we observe in our Endeavours to reform our offending Brethren, it may probably be with good Success; and not only so, but we may also reasonably hope that our tender Charity to them will provoke them to make a Return of Love to us. This it will certainly do, if, by the prudent Care that we take about them, we can bring them to Repentance and Amendment; for then they will not be able not to love those who have been so very instrumental in saving their Souls from eternal Destruction. But if thro' an imprudent and over-hasty Zeal we invert this Method, and begin at the wrong End of it, *i. e.* if we expose every Brother who is overtaken in a Fault (if we expose him, I say,) for his first Offence, to the highest Censures of the Church, if that could be done, or to the Correction of the Whipping-Post, or the Stocks, to any ignominious and shameful Punishment, thereby publishing that Fault, which before was not publick; it may reasonably be feared that the quite contrary Effects will follow, *i. e.* that we shall neither work his Reformation, nor gain his Love, by this means, but rather both harden him in his Wickedness, and provoke him to treat us as his Enemies. For to expose to Shame a Man who has not yet sinned himself past Shame, is the ready Course to make him impudent and shameless, and consequently much harder to be reformed, than he yet is, while he retains, in some good Degree, his natural Modesty, and so may be restrained from proceeding in his Wickedness, by the Fear of that Shame which it is very likely it will bring him to: For when once that is actually come upon a Man, which he before feared, he then ceases to fear it; so that the Fear of it can then be no longer any Restraint upon him. And he who is handled so very severely for his first or second Offence, by a Person who pretends it is his Desire and Design to reform him, will hardly believe his Pretence, he will hardly be persuaded that it was true Charity which put him upon using such great Severity, when gentler Means and Methods had been manifestly more likely to effect his Design: He will rather think it was Spite, or Malice, or Revenge, which prompted him to it, and so will be much more likely to revenge it as an Injury, than to acknowledge it as a Kindness. It is good Advice therefore, which the *Apostle* gives, *Gal. vi. 1.* with which I shall conclude this Head: *Brethren, if any Man be overtaken in a Fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering thy self, lest thou also be tempted.* But,

III. And lastly, The Words of the Text being a general proverbial Expression, cited indeed by our *Saviour*, upon a particular Occasion, but not by him expressly applied, much less appropriated thereto: (For the Application thereof, to that Purpose for which he used it, being so very easy, it was enough for him only to mention the Proverb, *Give not that which is holy unto Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine*, leaving it to his Hearers to make the Application; the Advice, I say, being given only in a general proverbial Expression,) and the Nature of Proverbs being generally such, that they may be fitly used upon several Occasions, and be aptly applied to more Purposes than one; it is reasonable to understand the Words of the Text in a still larger Sense; *viz.* as designed by our *Saviour* to order and command us to have a prudent Consideration of the Temper and Disposition of the Persons we have to deal with, in all other Matters or Cases wherein Religion is concerned, as well as in the Case of Reproof or Correction of an offending Brother; and so to order our Conversation when we happen to be in Company, or to have to deal with such Men as are here meant, by *Dogs* and *Swine*, as neither to expose Religion to Contempt, nor our selves to needless Dangers and Persecutions. *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, nei-*

ther cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.

The Time will not permit me now to enlarge much upon this Head; and therefore at present I shall only just briefly mention some few other Things, which, as well as brotherly Reproof and Admonition, may be justly deemed *holy Things*, and *Pearls*, and are therefore not to be thrown to *Dogs*, or cast before *Swine*, who understand not their Worth, nor will be at all benefited thereby, but rather the more enraged against us. And,

1. Such is the holy Word of God, or the Doctrine of the Gospel, which therefore tho' commanded by our *Saviour* himself to be preached to all, *Mark* xvi. 15. *Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature*; yet is not to be forced nor pressed upon any, but such as are disposed and willing to receive it. And therefore to this general Commission there given by our *Saviour* to his Apostles, to preach the Gospel to all, he in other Places adds some Restrictions and Limitations, as in *Matth.* x. 11, &c. *Into whatsoever City or Town ye enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and when ye come into an House, salute it; and if the House be worthy, let your Peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your Peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, and hear your Words, when ye depart out of that House or City, shake off the Dust of your Feet.* And according to this Rule the *Apostles* practised, as has been already noted; for thus, when the *Jews* at *Antioch* had contradicted and blasphemed the Things spoken by *St. Paul*, he left them, and turned to the *Gentiles*. They judged themselves unworthy of everlasting Life, and he approved their Judgment, and as such he left them; and when he went thence, *shook off the Dust of his Feet*, as you may see, *Acts* xiii. 45, 46, 51. And the like he did at *Corinth*, when the *Jews* opposed themselves and blasphemed, *he shook his Raiment, and said unto them, your Blood be upon your own Heads*, *Acts* xviii. 6.

2. Such especially are the sublime and mysterious Doctrines of the Gospel, as the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the like; they are Doctrines easy to be received and embraced, upon the Credit of plain divine Revelation, by such as are modest and docible; but it is not fit to propose them to such as are proud and conceited of their own Knowledge; who think themselves too wise to be taught by God, and will not be persuaded to believe any thing but what they can fathom, and fully comprehend, or give Account of by natural Reason. To preach these Doctrines to such, is no better than *to cast Pearls before Swine*; and only gives them Occasion to open their Mouths wider in Reproach and Blasphemy.

3. The Sacraments of the Gospel are likewise holy Things, of singular Use and Comfort to such as are piously and well disposed, and consider well the Grace of God which accompanies his own holy Institutions; but they are of no Use nor Benefit at all to those who look no farther in the Sacraments than to the outward Signs, and despise them as useless and insignificant Ceremonies. They see not what Good the Soul can receive by the Body's being washed with Water; and they discern not the Lord's Body in the consecrated Bread and Wine. Such therefore as have no other Notion of these holy Rites, than only as of common washing, or ordinary eating and drinking, are not to be invited, nor, if it can be avoided, are they to be admitted to partake of the holy Sacraments, till they are better instructed in the Nature of them; because till then they will be of no more Use to them, than *Pearls* are to *Swine*; which, not distinguishing them from common Pebbles, they boldly trample under their Feet.

4. And lastly, The Words thus generally understood, *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine*, may be taken as meaning to advise us to use a prudent Caution in the publick Profession and

Exercise of our Religion in general. Thus, for Instance, we must be prepared patiently to undergo any Persecutions, which cannot be avoided, for the keeping of a good Conscience; but we are not bound to expose our selves to Persecutions which may be avoided; but being *persecuted in one City*, we may, as our *Saviour* directs, *fly into another*; much less are we bound by any imprudent and unseasonable Expressions of our Zeal for the Truth, to invite Men to persecute and afflict us. This is nothing else but to provoke the *Dogs* to tear and rend us; and that we need not do, for they will be forward enough to fall upon us, without our provoking and enraging them to do it. And thus again we ought, as *St. Peter* directs, *1 Epist. iii. 15. to be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us, with Meekness and Fear; i.e.* whenever we are called to it, we should make a bold and open Confession of our Faith and Religion, whatever may be the Consequence of it. But at other Times, when we are not called to it, and when our publick owning the Faith and Religion we are of, is not likely to do Good, and may probably be Occasion of much Harm to our selves, or to our Christian Brethren, or to our Religion; it may be better to conceal what we are; I mean not by Denial, or any sinful Compliance, but only by Silence and Secrecy, till a better Opportunity shall be offered of making a publick Profession thereof.

And several other Cases of the like Nature I might instance in, if the Time would permit; but the Sum of all which needs to be said upon this Head, is fully comprehended in those Words of our *Saviour*; *Matth. x. 16. Behold I send you forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves; be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves; i.e.* our first and chiefest Care ought always to be, to be *innocent as Doves; i.e.* never to omit a necessary Duty in its proper Season, nor by any worldly Fears or Hopes to be drawn into any sinful Compliance. But after that Care is taken, we may use all the Art and Policy we are Masters of, that is consistent with Innocence, to save our selves from Harm; we may likewise be *wise as Serpents*, for it is not only our Prudence, but our Duty, *not to give that which is holy unto the Dogs, nor to cast our Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent us.* And so much may serve to have been spoken on these Words.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.



DISCOURSE LXXIV.

Of the Nature and Duty of Prayer.

MATTH. VII. 7, 8.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.



It is hard to observe or conceive any Connexion between these Words and the foregoing, and I suppose there is none; but that our *Saviour* here began to treat of a new Subject, and designed to instruct his Hearers in the Nature, and to persuade them to the due and constant Exercise, of the great Duty of Prayer. And the same shall be also my Design in discoursing upon them *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, &c.*

In discoursing on these Words, I shall,

I. Speak somewhat, in general, concerning the Duty of Prayer, and our Obligation to practise it. *Ask, and it shall be given you.*

II. I shall discourse more particularly concerning those two Qualifications of a prevailing Prayer, which are intimated in the Text; *viz.* 1. that it be earnest and urgent: and 2. that it be constant and importunate. The former is implied in the Word *seek*; *seek and ye shall find*; for to *seek* a Thing, implies greater Earnestness and Desire to have it, than is implied just in asking for it: And the latter is implied in the Word *knock*; *knock, and it shall be opened unto you*; for when a Man knocks at the Door of an House, he does not use to give one Knock only, and so go his way, but he continues knocking till the Door be opened. And,

III. I shall discourse somewhat concerning the Success and Efficacy of urgent and importunate Prayer; *ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; &c.*

I. I shall discourse somewhat in general, concerning the Duty of Prayer, and our Obligation to practise it; *ask, seek, and knock. Ask, and it shall be given you, &c.*

And what I think needful to say, concerning the Duty of Prayer in general, I shall reduce to these following Heads.

1. I shall briefly declare the Nature of Prayer, or shew what Prayer is.
2. I shall shew the Obligation which lies upon us to practise the Duty.

And, 3. I shall then briefly mention the several Sorts and Kinds of Prayer, and subjoin the particular Reasons obliging to each of them.

1. I shall briefly declare the Nature of Prayer, or shew what Prayer is. And all Acts of divine Worship, *Invocation, Confession, and Thanksgiving*, as well as *Petition*, are usually comprehended under the Word *Prayer*. But nevertheless, what is properly meant by the Word, and what the Text leads me to discourse chiefly of, is only *Petition*.

And *Petition* is the Desire of our Soul, for the obtaining of some good Thing which we want, directed to God, whom we believe able to bestow the same upon us. This is the Definition of *Prayer*, properly so called; the Parts of which Definition being briefly explained, will be a sufficient Account of the Nature of Prayer in general.

(I.) Then, I say, that Prayer is the Desire of the Soul; and this Part of the Definition declares the Form of the Essence of Prayer, that it consists in an inward Desire of the Thing prayed for; and not in Words, Place or Posture, or any other outward Expression or Circumstance of Devotion. For a Man may be upon his Knees, the Posture of praying, or he may be in the Church, the House of Prayer, for a whole Hour together, and yet not be praying one single Minute of that time: Nay, he may be all the while reading or repeating over a Form of Words, drawn up in the Form of a Prayer or Petition to God, and yet not be praying at all. For he is no longer praying, than while his Heart goes along with his Tongue, and while he inwardly desires those Things which he outwardly asks for. And on the other side, though a Man utters no Words at all, nor uses any Sign or Posture of Devotion, and whatever Place he is in, in a Field, in his Shop, or in his Closet, if he inwardly desires any Thing of God, this is praying. An Ejaculation of the Mind alone is a Prayer, but no Words or Expressions, without a Desire of the Mind accompanying them, are so.

And this is a Point which should be well considered by us, to prevent, so far as is possible, all wandring Thoughts in Prayer, and that we may not rest in, nor satisfy our selves only with the outward Shew of Devotion. For there are very few so void of all Religion, as not to be persuaded that Prayer is a necessary Duty; but then there are a great many, who call that praying, which is not so; nay, and who persuade themselves that they have fully discharged their Duty in this Point, whereas in Truth they have not performed it at all: For they have, it may be, been at the Church, or upon their Knees, and there they heard the Minister read or say over the Words of a very good Prayer; or perhaps they themselves, at home, or in their Closets, and in the same praying Posture, have read or repeated over the same with their own Mouths; and one or the other of these they have done, it may be, very regularly and constantly, two or three times every Day, and therefore they think they cannot be blamed as deficient in their Duty. But, for all this, they may have been very deficient in it; nay, they may have done all this very regularly and constantly, and yet not have

performed the Duty at all: For if while with their Mouths they repeated over the Words of a Prayer, their Minds were taken up with other Thoughts; or if while they were present at the publick Prayers, they only heard them, as they would have done a Chapter or a Sermon, just attending to the Sense of them, or observing the Expressions thereof; if when they repeated the Words of a Prayer, their Heart did not go along with their Tongue; or if, when they were present at the publick Prayers, they did not join therewith in their Minds, and say an inward *Amen* thereto; they may be said to have been reading, or speaking, or hearing, but they cannot be said to have been praying: Because the very Form and Essence of Prayer, is an inward Desire of the Things prayed for, and that was wholly wanting.

(2.) The next Thing declared in the Definition of Prayer, which I have before given, is the Subject Matter of Prayer. Prayer, I said, is the Desire of the Soul, for the obtaining of some good Thing which we want. The general Subject of Prayer is some good Thing; *i. e.* what either is really good for us, or what we apprehend to be so; for we cannot desire any Thing, but under the Notion of Good. But then, in order to our desiring it, it is also requisite that we want it; that is, that it be some good Thing which we have not already, and also that we are sensible of the Need we have of it. For what we have already we cannot desire, unless it be only the Continuance of it; and unless we are persuaded that we have Need of it, *i. e.* that it would contribute much to our Welfare and Happiness to have it, we cannot earnestly desire it: For be the Thing in it self ever so good, yet unless we conceive it would do us good we shall be indifferent whether we have it or no. Whatever therefore we conceive would conduce to the Welfare either of our Souls or Bodies, either in this Life or in the next, is the proper Matter or Subject of Prayer.

(3.) The next Thing to be taken Notice of in the Definition of Prayer before given, is the Object of Prayer, or the Person to whom our Desire of any good Thing which we want, must be directed or signified; and that is God. Prayer, I told you, is the Desire of the Soul, for the obtaining of some good Thing which we want, directed or signified to God. For when we ask or beg of a Man, or any other created Being, such Help or Assistance as he is able to give us, or any good Thing which we think it is in his Power to bestow upon us, this may indeed be called Prayer; but it is not what we mean by religious Prayer, which is the only Subject I am now speaking of. For a religious Prayer must be directed to God, and to God only; and if we put up a Prayer to any other Being, for the bestowing upon us any good Thing, which is only in the Power of God to bestow, we make that Being a God, and so become guilty of Idolatry. But then,

(4.) And lastly; in order to the exciting in us such a Desire of any good Thing as is properly meant by Prayer, it is requisite, not only that we be sensible of our own Want of what we desire, but likewise that we be persuaded, that he of whom we desire it, is able to bestow it upon us; else our Desire of it is not properly a Prayer, but rather only a random Wish. And therefore I added in the Definition of Prayer before given, that this Desire of the good Things we want must be directed to God, as able to bestow the same upon us. For unless we think him able to supply our Wants, we shall have no Encouragement to direct or signify our Desires to him, but may as well keep them within our own Breasts.

And thus much may serve for the first Thing, which was to explain the Nature of Prayer in general, or to shew what Prayer is. I proceed now in the second Place,

2. To shew the Obligation which lies upon us to practise this Duty, and thereby

thereby to persuade us to it. And here, not to mention the Benefits and Advantages of Prayer, which I shall have Occasion to speak somewhat of by and by, I shall at present observe only these two Things: (1.) That to pray to God is a very reasonable Duty in it self; and, (2.) that it is expressly required and commanded by God, as the Condition of our obtaining from him such Things as we stand in Need of.

(1.) That to pray to God for such Things as we want is a very reasonable Duty; it is indeed what Reason alone would have taught us, and prompted us to, though it had been no where commanded; for it is natural to desire what we want. This is what needs not be prescribed, because it is what we cannot avoid doing: And therefore since God, and he only, is able to supply all our Wants, what can be a more reasonable Duty than that we should direct our Desires, and put up our Petitions to him? This is what natural Reason alone has taught the most ignorant and savage People upon Earth, that seeing they need a great many Things which they are not able to supply themselves withal, they ought to endeavour to get their Wants supplied by imploring the Aid and Assistance of some Being that is more mighty and powerful than themselves; and the most barbarous Nations in the World have had a Notion and Persuasion that there is some such Being; a Being infinitely superior to themselves; and on whom they have a necessary Dependence, and who is able to do for them all that they can desire. Indeed, who this Being is, some Persons, and some whole Nations too, have been ignorant of; and therefore have been greatly mistaken in the Object of their Worship, and have directed their Prayers to Devils, or the Souls of deceased Men, instead of God who made Heaven and Earth, and all Things therein. But in the general Notion of the Being of a God, and that he ought to be worshiped and prayed to, there has been an universal Agreement among all People and Nations of the World; so that Prayer may well be reckoned one of the first Duties which natural Reason teaches; which therefore, if we neglect to practise, we shew our selves not only destitute of Religion, but void of Reason too.

And if to this it should be objected, that seeing God himself knows what Things we stand in need of, without our telling him, there is no Need that we should acquaint him with our Wants; and that seeing he is an infinitely good and kind Being, more ready to give than we are either to ask or to receive, there is no Need of our urging and soliciting him to do what his own innate Goodness will prompt him to do for us, altho' we do not ask it: The Answer is easy, *viz.*

That these two Attributes of God, his Knowledge and his Goodness, are so far from rendring it unreasonable to pray to him for such Things as we want, that it is indeed chiefly the Consideration of these Attributes of God, which shew it to be a reasonable Duty to pray to him. For,

First, As to his Knowledge. If he did not know every Thing, we should want that good Encouragement which we now have to put up our Prayers to him, because then we could not be sure that he would hear our Prayers. And his knowing what we want, before we declare our Wants to him, is no Reason at all why we should not declare them: For still, though we do not tell him any thing which he knew not before, it is but fit and reasonable however, that as we are really in Want, we should own our Wants to him; that, as we are really dependent upon him, we should acknowledge our Dependence upon him. In a Word; that we are indigent and impotent; that we need many Things, and what Things they are which we need; that we cannot supply our own Needs, and that
God

God alone is able to supply them : All these Things, God knows, as well, or indeed, rather much better than we do : But for all that, it is but fit and becoming us, that we should profess and own what we know to be true, and freely declare the Sense we have of our own Weakness, and of the Power of God. And,

Secondly, As to the Goodness of God. If we did not believe him to be a good, benign, and bountiful Being, we should have no good Encouragement to entreat him to be kind to us. And on the other side, our knowing that he is so, *i. e.* that he is ready and willing to do us good, is a very good Reason to induce us to pray him to be kind to us, because it gives us good Assurance that our Prayers will be successful.

But what Need, you will say, is there of our praying to him for that, which he, being a kind and merciful Being, will bestow upon us without asking?

I answer; although we were sure that he would do for us all that we ask, without our asking; though indeed upon this Supposition our Prayers would not be so necessary as now they are, yet even then it would be a reasonable and necessary Duty to pray to God. For it is but reasonable, that a Son should ask his Father for Bread when he wants it, although he knows his Father's Goodness and Love to him are such, that he would give it him without asking; for by his asking it he acknowledges his Dependence upon his Father. And this is a very just and reasonable Acknowledgment on the Son's Part; it is an Acknowledgment which the Son ought to make of his own accord, although his Father did not expressly require him to make it.

But then, I say, farther, that it is a mistaken Notion of God's Goodness, which makes us think he will give us every Thing we want without our asking. It is true indeed, he might always do thus if he pleased; and he does daily do us a great deal of Good without asking, and by his Bounty prevents our Petitions: But that he always does, or that he always will do thus, we have no Reason to conclude, only from the Consideration of the divine Goodness. For though the Goodness of God be infinite, so that we cannot set Bounds to it, it may nevertheless be truly said, that it is limited and bounded by his own Wisdom and Justice; he is as good and gracious as an infinitely just and wise Being can be, and that is infinite Goodness; but he is not good and gracious beyond what is just and wise. And therefore in many Cases, though our Prayers are not necessary to move him to Compassion, they may be necessary to move him to express and exercise his Compassion towards us; because if he should give us every Thing which we wanted, without asking, this might not be agreeable to his Wisdom; because then Men would not be so sensible of their Dependence upon God, but they would be more apt to attribute the good Things they received to Chance, or to the natural Course of Things: Whereas now, while good Things are in great Measure withheld from Men, till they pray for them, and then are given them upon their Petition; by this they see who it is that does them good; by this they are convinced how highly it concerns them to endeavour to procure his Favour and Good-will towards them. But,

2. If there were no Reason to be given of this Duty, no Reason, I mean, why God should exact and require it of us; it is a Reason abundantly sufficient to oblige us to the careful and constant Practice of it, that it is expressly required and commanded by God, to whom we owe an absolute and entire Obedience in whatsoever he commands; and that our Performances thereof is made by the divine Will, the Condition upon which only

only we can be assured of having our Wants supplied by God. *Ask, and it shall be given you.*

And, I suppose, I shall not need to cite any Texts of Scripture for the Proof of this, because I cannot suppose any Person here present so unacquainted with Scripture, as not in the reading or hearing it to have met with several Places most strictly enjoining this Duty. And that our Neglect to practise this Duty as we ought, is the only Reason that we have not every Thing which we want, and can reasonably desire; every Thing which is really good for us, we are plainly told by St. *James*, Ch. iv. ver. 2. *Ye have not, because ye ask not.*

Supposing therefore that enough hath been already said to explain the Nature of Prayer, and to shew our general Obligation to the Practice of it, both from Reason and Scripture, I proceed to the next Thing proposed, which was,

3. To mention the several Sorts and Kinds of Prayer, and to subjoin the particular Reasons obliging to each of them.

And here, considering the *Matter* of Prayer, I might distinguish it into Prayer for *spiritual*, and Prayer for *temporal* good Things; or into Prayer for *our selves*, or Intercession for *others*.

Or considering the *Manner* of Prayer, I might distinguish it into *mental* or *vocal* Prayer; mental Prayer being when we only pray in our Hearts, without uttering or expressing any Words; and vocal Prayer, when we express in Words, and utter with our Mouth the Desires of our Hearts.

But the only Distinction which I shall at present insist upon, shall be that of *publick*, and *secret Prayer*: Publick Prayer being when we join with others in putting up our common Petitions to God; and secret Prayer, when being retired from all Company, we put up our private Petitions to him. And these, though for Substance and Matter they are the same, and differ only in the Circumstance of Place, or Company, are yet really two distinct Duties, and both of them so necessary upon several Accounts to be performed in their proper Season and Opportunity, that the doing of the one will not wholly excuse the doing of the other.

It is true indeed, that the more Opportunities we have for publick Prayer, the less Time we shall be obliged to spend in our private Devotions; but yet some Time must nevertheless be spent in private Prayer, or else how much Time soever we spend in our publick Devotion, we shall be deficient in a necessary Duty. For though, whenever we put up any Prayer to God, whether in publick or in secret, we perform the Duty of Prayer, and discharge the Condition upon which God has promised his Blessing; yet there are some Ends which may be served by publick Prayer, which cannot be served by private; and some again that may be served by private Prayer, which cannot be served by publick: There are consequently particular and peculiar Reasons obliging to each of them. And therefore, though the general End of Prayer is served by either of them, whether private or publick; upon which Account, when we have not Opportunity for the one, the other may for the most Part serve instead of it; yet since all the Ends of Prayer are not, nor can be, served by either of them alone, we are obliged to practise both, each of them at all convenient and proper Seasons. For,

(1.) By publick Prayer, when we join with others in putting up our common Petitions to God, we do most Honour to God and Religion: By this also we shew a good Example to the World, and help to kindle Devotion in others: And lastly; these Prayers are the most certain of good

Vol. II.

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Success,

Success, being encouraged by a special Promise of our *Saviour*, Matth. xviii. 20. *Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.*

This therefore is a Duty by it self, which our private Devotions will not serve instead of, or suffice to excuse us from. For as we are obliged to acknowledge to God himself our Dependence upon him, so we are obliged also to own the same to the World; as we are bound to put up Prayers to God for our selves, so we are also bound to intercede with him for others; as it is our Duty to glorify God in our Heart, so it is likewise our Duty to glorify him with our Mouth; and as we ought to edify our selves, so we ought also, as we are able, to endeavour to edify others. And all these Ends of Prayer are best served by publick Prayer; and the more publick our publick Prayers are, the better do they serve and promote the Ends of publick Prayer. And therefore the most publick Prayers of all being those in the Church, when the whole Parish or Neighbourhood, by publick Appointment, meet together to worship God, these Opportunities ought by no Means to be neglected by us; especially not on the Lord's Day, the Day of the solemn Assemblies, the Day dedicated and set apart on purpose for this Use. For if (having no just Objection to the Prayers which are used in publick,) when we are not hindred, as sometimes perhaps we may be, by a very reasonable Excuse, we omit to join with our Brethren in the publick Worship of God; whatever Pretences we may make of Piety and Religion, our Omission of this most necessary Duty is a certain Argument that we are clearly destitute of it; and that, whatever we pretend, we have no real Regard either to the Honour of God, or the Edification of his Church. It is possible indeed, that a Man who makes a great Shew of Religion in publick, and who duly frequents the Church, may yet have no true Sense of Religion in his Mind; but it is not possible that a Man, who is truly religious, should not make a Shew and Profession of it; because the outward Shew and Profession of Religion is it self a Part, and a necessary Duty of Religion. So that though there may be a Shew of Piety, where there is no real Piety, there can be no true Piety where there is not a Shew of it; and the greater the Shew, provided there be true Piety at the Bottom, the greater the Piety.

I say therefore again, as I said before, the more publick our publick Prayers are, the better; and if they could always be offered up in the Church, and in the Assembly of the Faithful, on the Week-days, as well as on Sundays, it would be best of all; but since all have not Opportunity for this, the next most publick Sort of Prayer is in the Family: This therefore, where there is not Opportunity for the other, should be practised in the room of it; and if we cannot meet together in as great Numbers as we ought, to worship God, we ought however to meet in as great Numbers as we can. And to this kind of publick Worship are annexed the same Advantages, and the same Promises, as to the other, only in a less Degree; for hereby also we publickly glorify God, we own and profess to the World our Dependence upon him, we give a good Example, we quicken the Devotion of others, and we shall also receive a gracious Answer to these Petitions, according to the Promise of our *Saviour* before-cited, that *where any, tho' they be but two or three, are gathered together in his Name, he will be there in the midst of them.* But,

(2.) As publick Prayer is a Duty by it self, so is private Prayer also a Duty by it self, which our publick Prayers, though we have ever so frequent Opportunities for them, will not excuse us from; but which, however, we ought to be more regular and constant in the Practice of, when the

the Opportunities of publick Devotion are but few, and return but seldom.

For we are guilty of a great many Sins which are not so proper to be made the Matter of a publick Confession, because that must be made in general Words, such as every one in the Congregation may join in; these Sins therefore we ought to mourn for, and to confess to God in private, in our Closet, or some secret Retirement.

Some Petitions also there are more peculiar to every Man's own self, which therefore he ought to put up to God when he is by himself, because they are not so proper to be put up in Company.

Nay, and even the most common Petitions, such as we may, and when we have Opportunity we ought to put up in Company with others, joining with us in the same Petitions; I say, even these Petitions we ought also at other times to put up by our selves in private; to testify thereby our Belief of God's Omniscience, and to assure our selves thereby of our own Sincerity; according to that express Command of our Saviour, in *Matth. vi. 5, 6. When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the Hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the Synagogues, and in the Corners of the Streets, that they may be seen of Men.* This was the Case of the Pharisees; they were a People much given to Prayer, and, as our Saviour observes in another Place, they used to make very long Prayers too, but they prayed only in publick, *in the Synagogues, and in the Corners of the Streets*, where they might be seen by others; and thus they chose to pray, because that was their chief Design in praying, that they might be taken for very devout and religious Persons; so that with the fairest Shew of Religion, they were, in truth, the vilest of Hypocrites.

And this may be any Man's Case, who seldom or never prays but in Company; he may deceive others, nay and he may deceive himself too, with a Shew and Appearance of Piety, and yet be all the while but an Hypocrite: Or though he be sincere, yet he cannot be sure of his own Sincerity; he cannot be sure that the Desire of Praise from Men is not the prevailing Ingredient in his Devotions.

But a Man may be more certain of his Sincerity, when he makes a Conscience of praying to God in secret, when no Eye sees but God's, and when no Person in the World knows what he is doing but God only. For true Religion must needs be, I do not say, the prevailing, but the only Motive to secret Devotion, because there is no other End to be served by it. And as the Ends of publick Prayer are best served, the more publick the Prayer is; so the Ends of private Prayer are most promoted by the greatest Privacy and Secrecy in the Performance of the Duty; and therefore it is our Saviour's Direction in the Words immediately following those afore-cited; *but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy Closet, and when thou hast shut the Door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

In a Word; publick Prayer is, in several Respects, better than private; and private Prayer is likewise, in several Respects, better than publick; *i. e.* they are both best in their proper Season; they are consequently, though in Matter the same, yet really two distinct Duties, and will be each of them rewarded by God; *i. e.* I mean, if our Prayers are so qualified as they ought to be; and how that is, we are taught in the Text; where, after the general Exhortation to Prayer, *Ask, and it shall be given you;* it is added, *seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

In which Words, as I have already observed, there are two Qualifications of prevailing Prayer clearly intimated: 1. That it be earnest and urgent; *seek, and ye shall find;* for to seek a Thing, implies greater Earnestness and

and Desire to have it, than is implied just in asking for it : And, 2. that it be constant and importunate; *knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* For when a Man knocks at the Door of an House, he does not use to give one Knock only, and so go his Way, but he continues knocking, till the Door be opened.

But to speak of these two Qualifications, or Conditions of prevailing Prayer, which was the second, and of the Success and Efficacy of urgent and importunate Prayer, which was the third general Head propounded to be spoken to, will be Matter enough for another Discourse; and so I shall defer it to a farther Opportunity.



DISCOURSE LXXV.

Of the Qualifications of Prayer.

MATTH. VII. 7, 8.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.



OUR Saviour's Design, in these Words, was to instruct his Hearers in the Nature, and to persuade them to the due and constant Exercise of the great Duty of Prayer; in pursuance of which same Design I have therefore proposed, in discoursing upon them, to do these three Things.

I. To speak somewhat in general concerning the Duty of Prayer, and our Obligation to practise it. *Ask, and it shall be given you.*

II. To speak more particularly concerning those two Conditions or Qualifications of prevailing Prayer which are intimated in the Text, *viz.* 1. That it be earnest and urgent: And, 2. That it be constant and importunate. *Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* And,

III. To discourse somewhat concerning the Success and Efficacy of urgent and importunate Prayer. *Every one that asketh, receiveth; &c.*

I. I proposed to speak somewhat in general concerning the Nature of Prayer, and our Obligation to practise it; *ask, and it shall be given you.* And I have already, in a former Discourse on the Words, said as much as I thought was needful on this Head; having shewn what Prayer is, our Obligation to pray, and the Necessity of doing it, both in publick with others, and in private by our selves.

II. The second Thing proposed, was to speak somewhat more particularly concerning those two Conditions or Qualifications of prevailing Prayer, which are intimated in the Text; *viz.* 1. That it be earnest and urgent: And, 2. That it be constant and importunate. The former is implied in the Word *seek; seek, and ye shall find:* For to seek a Thing implies greater Earnest-

ness and Desire to have it, than is implied just in asking for it. And the latter is implied in the Word *knock*; *knock, and it shall be opened unto you*: That Word, I say, implies a frequent Repetition of, a constant Continuance in, the Duty. For when a Man knocks at the Door of an House, he does not use to give one Knock only, and so go his Way, in case the People who are within do not answer presently; but so long as he knows they are within, he continues knocking, until the Door be opened to him.

1. Then, I am to shew what Fervency or Earnestness in Prayer is requisite to make it availing; *seek, and ye shall find*. Now to seek for a Thing, is, as I observed before, more than barely to ask for it: To seek, implies an earnest Desire to have the Thing which we seek for.

And in general, that Fervency or Earnestness which is requisite to make our Petitions to God for any Mercy availing, is an inward hearty Desire accompanying our outward Expressions; the saying an inward hearty *Amen*, to every Petition which we put up to God with our Lips: We are then fervent in Prayer, when our Lips and our Heart move together in the same Petition. So St. James, speaking of the Prophet *Elijah*, *Jam. v. 17.* says of him, *προσευχῇ ὡς οὐρανίζατο, he prayed in his Prayer*; we translate it, *he prayed earnestly*. His Desires were lively, vehement, and passionate, for the obtaining of that which he prayed for; and so must ours be, whenever we put up any Petition to God for any Thing, or else our Prayers will not avail us any thing; we must not only ask for what we want, but we must diligently and earnestly seek it, if ever we hope to find it; *seek, and ye shall find*.

For even our blessed Saviour himself, the well-beloved Son of the Father, was heard by him upon no other Terms; even his Prayer, if it had not been fervent, would not have been availing; and therefore the Author to the Hebrews observes, *Heb. v. 7.* that when *in the Days of his Flesh he offered up Prayers and Supplications unto him that was able to save him from Death*; he did it *with strong Crying and Tears*. And to the Warmth and Fervency of his Prayer is attributed the good Success of it, in the Words immediately following; *he was heard, in that he feared*.

And such must our Prayers to God be, if we hope for Success from them; they must be offered up with strong Crying, *i. e.* not with a loud Voice, but with an earnest Desire; not with passionate Expressions, but with a fervent Devotion; with a Mind fixed and attent to the Business we are about, and in an humble Sense of our own Wants and Weakness, and with a firm Belief of God's Power and Goodness.

Such Fervency in Prayer as this, is what our Saviour in the Text means by *seeking*; *seek, and ye shall find*. And this is the first necessary Condition or Qualification of a prevailing Prayer, it must be earnest or fervent.

2. The other necessary Condition or Qualification of a prevailing Prayer, intimated by our Saviour in the Text, is, that it be constant and importunate; *knock, says our Saviour, and it shall be opened unto you*.

And there are several other Phrases, by which this is expressed and enjoined in the holy Scripture, which it may not be amiss to consider; because tho' they have all the same Sense and Meaning with this in the Text, *knock, and it shall be opened unto you*; yet by comparing them all together, we shall best be instructed what our Duty is in this Matter, or what Constancy or Importunity in Prayer is requisite for the obtaining of our Petitions. There are, I say, several other Phrases, by which this is expressed and enjoined in the holy Scripture; *Watch and pray always*, says our Saviour, *Luke xxi. 36.* And, *to this Purpose he spake a Parable*, says St. Luke, *that Men ought always to pray, and not to faint*, *Luke xviii. 1.* And, *continue in Prayer, and watch in the same*, says St. Paul, *Col. iv. 2.* And again, *continue instant in Prayer*, *Rom. xii. 12.* And again, *pray always with all Prayer and Suppli-*

Supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all Perseverance, Eph. vi. 18. And, *pray without ceasing,* 1 Thess. v. 17. And, *I will that Men pray every where,* says the same Apostle, 1 Tim. ii. 8. And of her who is a Widow indeed, the same Apostle says, 1 Tim. v. 5. that *she continues in Supplications and Prayers, Night and Day.* Give him no Rest, says the Prophet Isaiah, chap. lxii. 7. And the holy Psalmist, describing the Practice of himself, and other devout Persons in his Time, thus expresses it, Psal. cxxiii. 2. *Behold, as the Eyes of Servants look unto the Hand of their Masters, and as the Eyes of a Maiden unto the Hand of her Mistress, so our Eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have Mercy upon us.*

By these, and such like Phrases, Constancy and Importunity in Prayer is expressed and enjoined in the holy Scripture. The Meaning of which was very much misunderstood by some Hereticks in the ancient Church, who thought themselves obliged thereby to spend their whole Time in praying, to the Neglect of all other Duties, and even of such Care and Labour as was necessary for the Support of Life.

But these did not err so much on the one Hand, as the Generality of Men do now err on the other Hand, who notwithstanding these Precepts enjoining such Attendance to, and Assiduity in this Duty, do nevertheless pass away whole Days, a great many perhaps whole Weeks, without so much as once seriously recommending themselves to God's Care, and craving his Blessing. For,

(1.) The least which can possibly be meant by a Precept, enjoining us to do a Thing *always* or *continually*, is that we should do it *very often*, that we should not suffer any great Space of Time to pass in the Intermission of it. And therefore they who never, or very seldom, never perhaps but when they are under some sore Affliction, or in some great Danger, do think upon God, and set themselves to seek his Favour, as they are manifestly guilty of the Breach of those Precepts which command a Constancy and Continuedness in Prayer; so they have no Reason to expect that those Prayers which they do put up in their Affliction or Distress should avail them much; because they do not then think upon God by Choice, but by Constraint, and because they cannot help it: They seek his Aid then, only because they have nothing else to trust to, or depend upon. And there is little Reason to expect that God should think upon them in the Time of their Adversity and Distress, who lived in a constant Forgetfulness of God all the Time of their Wealth and Prosperity. *Because I have called,* says God, *and ye refused, I have stretched out my Hands, and no Man regarded: I also will laugh at your Calamity, and mock when your Fear cometh. When your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction cometh as a Whirlwind, when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me,* Prov. i. 24, &c.

(2.) To pray *always*, or to pray *continually*, implies at least that we should make Prayer a Part of our Task and Business; that we should set about it not only at leisure Times, and when we have nothing else to employ our selves about, but that we should allot and set apart some Times on purpose for it; even though it be to the Neglect of other Business: This being indeed as necessary a Business in its Season, as any other Work which we can at any time employ our selves about; a Business so very necessary, that while we neglect it, we cannot reasonably hope for good Success in any other Enterprise which we take in Hand. For we cannot be said to do a Thing always and continually, if we never set about it, but only when we have nothing else to employ our selves in; if we do it only as it were by Chance, and by the by; and, in Case such a leisure Time had not happened, should not have done it at all.

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(3.) The Precepts commanding us to pray continually, and without ceasing, do farther enjoin, that at least, we should not neglect those Times and Seasons of discharging this Duty which are set apart for this purpose, either by divine Appointment, or by publick Authority: Such in particular are the *Lord's Day*, and the other Feasts and Fasts of the Church. To omit praying at other Times besides these, is indeed a culpable Omission, and an Argument of great Coldness and Indifference in the Worship of God; but to omit it at these set and stated Times, argues a Contempt of the Duty, and a perfect Want of Religion. When we do not of our own Accord put our selves upon the Duty, and seek Occasions for it, it is an Argument of great Carelessness of our own good, and of want of Love to God: But when we refuse to pray, although we are called upon and invited to it by the Company of the Faithful, who say to us, *Come now, and let us go up into the House of God*; when, I say, we refuse to accept of this Invitation, and purposely set our selves to do our own Works, at those Times which are hallowed and set apart for God's Worship, we do in Effect, and by fair Interpretation, deny that there is a God, and disown that there is any Being above us to whom we owe any Worship or Homage. Nay, farther,

(4.) These solemn and stated Times of publick Worship coming but seldom, we cannot in any reasonable Sense be said to pray *continually*, and *without ceasing*, unless we also embrace all other fit Occasions of discharging this necessary Piece of Service. And what are fit Occasions, I shall not need to tell you; for as to Times and Seasons, all are alike to God. Our God never is, as *Elijah* said mockingly to the Priests and Worshipers of *Baal* concerning their God; our God, I say, never is, either *talking, or persuing, or in a Journey, or asleep*, so that his Worshipers may sometimes happen to spend their Breath to no purpose when they call upon him; but *his Ears are always open* to the devout Prayers of his humble Supplicants: And therefore whensoever we are sensible of our Need of any Thing, that is a proper Time to put up a Petition to God for it. And our Wants are so many, and our Needs do so often return upon us, that if we did but pray as often as we have Need to pray, we should fulfil the Apostle's Precept in the literal and strictest Sense, we should indeed *pray without ceasing*, and without Intermision; we should be so often at our Prayers, that we should scarcely find Time enough to spend in any other Matters; we should, to be sure, have none to spare, to pass away in Idleness, or to spend in the Works of Sin and the Devil.

(5.) Our Wants being so many, and so continual, and returning upon us every Day, we ought at least every Day to put up our Petition to God for the Supply of them; and the Intermision of Prayer, but for one Day only, is a manifest Breach of those apostolical Precepts whereby we are enjoined to *pray always*, and to *pray without ceasing*. And that to pray to God at least every Day is our most necessary and indispensable Duty, is farther clearly intimated in that Pattern or Form of Prayer which our *Saviour* himself hath taught us; one Petition whereof is, *Give us this Day our daily Bread*; which Expression plainly supposes, that we are to put up this Petition (and consequently all other necessary Petitions) to God every Day. For we need our daily Bread, *i. e.* all the Necessaries of Life, every we live; and God has not promised to supply us with them, unless we pray for them. And therefore being, in this Prayer of our Lord's own making, taught to pray only for the Necessaries of this present Day, this clearly implies that it is our indispensable Duty to repeat this Petition, and to renew this Request to God every Day; and if this, then other Requests too; for this

this is but one of a great many Petitions, which we are taught in that same Prayer. But then farther,

(6.) There being a remarkable Division of Time into two Parts, *viz.* the Day and the Night, the former designed for Business, and the latter for Rest; and each of these Seasons having its peculiar Wants; for the proper Wants of the Day are, an Ability to go about and discharge the Work which God hath set us, and his Blessing upon our Endeavours, and his Grace to keep us from Temptations, or to enable us to overcome them; and the proper and more peculiar Wants of the Night are the Care and Protection of the divine Providence, to guard and defend us from all Evils and Dangers; which, though indeed we do always stand in need of, and cannot live without one Moment; for it is *in God*, as the *Apostle* says, that *we live, and move, and have our Being*; yet we then seem to want more especially, when our Powers and Faculties are all bound up by Sleep, and we are not able to take any Care at all of our selves. Each of these Seasons therefore, I say, the Day and the Night, having its peculiar Wants, it is highly reasonable that we should severally address our selves to God for the Supply of them; that is, that every Morning, when we rise, we should implore his Grace to assist and strengthen us in our Works, and his Blessing to prosper our Labours: And that every Night, before we go to Bed, we should solemnly commit our selves to his Protection.

And thus those Precepts of praying without ceasing, and praying continually, are expounded by some, *viz.* as extending no farther than in Proportion to the daily Sacrifices among the *Jews*, which were constantly offered every Morning and Evening; but they are by none conceived interpretable to any lower Proportion. So that we cannot in Reason be said to pray continually, unless our Prayers be offered as continually as the daily Sacrifice was; *i. e.* at least every Morning and Evening. I say, at least every Morning and Evening: For indeed,

(7.) And lastly; the Phrases used in Scripture, to enjoin a Constancy in this Duty, seem to imply much more; they seem to imply that there ought to be no Intermision of it, that we ought to be always praying. And seeing in this Sense the Precepts are practicable, I see no Reason why we should not think our selves obliged to practise accordingly. I do not mean that we ought to be, or that we can be, always actually upon our Knees, and offering up solemn Prayers to God; for this can be done only at some Seasons: But we may and ought to be always in a praying Temper; we may and ought to live in a constant and continual Sense of our Dependence upon God for all that we have or want, and to acknowledge the same, when we cannot do it in a set Prayer, at least in short Ejaculations, and Petitions of our Heart to God: And thus we may, even in a literal Sense, *pray continually, and without ceasing*; there being no Business of our Life which we set our selves to, or employ our selves in, to which it will be any Hindrance, to cast up now and then an Eye to Heaven, and to send up a short Wish or Petition to the Throne of Grace. Thus, I say, we may, and thus we ought to be ever praying, though we cannot be always what we call at Prayers. And thus praying always, and praying continually, will be so far from being an Hindrance to our other Works and Business, that it will rather greatly promote the same, and yield us much Comfort therein.

The Sum of what has been said on this Head, is this: It was not the Design of our Saviour in the Text, where he bids us *knock* that it may be opened to us; nor is it the Meaning of those other Places of Scripture which enjoin continual Prayer, and command us to *pray without ceasing*, that we should spend our whole Time in Prayer, and do nothing else, for that is impossible; and besides, it is inconsistent with our Obligation to other Duties.

But thus much most certainly they do enjoin, that we should not be so taken up with other Employments as to leave no room for this; but on the contrary, that we should be at Leisure for this, as much and as often as we can; and that whether we have Leisure or not, and even tho' it be to the Neglect of other Business, we should set apart some considerable Portion of our Time every Day for this Purpose. For certainly, when we are bid to *pray always*, and to *pray without ceasing*, the Meaning cannot be less than this, that we should pray often.

But if it be asked, how often at the least it is our necessary Duty to address our selves to God in a solemn and set Prayer, so that if we fail of doing it, how urgent soever our other Business and Occasions are, we commit a Sin; I know no Text of Scripture which hath determined that Point precisely.

But besides what hath been already said for the Resolution of Conscience in this Matter, we have in Scripture the Examples of good and holy Men set before us, which may give us some farther Direction therein. For of *Daniel* it is noted, *Dan. vi. 10.* that he *kneeled on his Knees three times a Day, and prayed and gave Thanks before his God.* And this Practice he would not intermit, even when he ran the Hazard of his Life by it. And the holy *Psalmist* says of himself, *Psal. lv. 18.* *At Evening, and Morning, and at Noon-day, will I pray, and cry aloud.*

These Examples therefore if we follow, we need not question but we shall fully observe those Precepts which require us to pray incessantly, according to the true Intent and Meaning of them. But on the contrary, if we fall much short of these Examples, as we cannot in any good Sense be said to pray incessantly; (for no Man can reasonably be said to do a Thing constantly, or always, which he doth not at least do frequently, at convenient Times, at Times not much distant from one another) so it is a Sign that our Piety and Devotion is much more cold than was that of these holy Men in primitive Times, and therefore it is no Wonder if we do not receive such large Returns from the divine Bounty.

Thus then we are to be constant in our Prayers; *i. e.* very frequent in the Practice of the Duty of Prayer in general; *knock*, that it may *be opened unto you.* But the Constancy or Importunity in Prayer, required in Scripture, and particularly by the Phrase here used in the Text, *knock, and it shall be opened*, imports still somewhat more than this, *viz.* that we should be frequent in putting up the same Petitions, and making the same Requests; that we should ask of God the same Things over and over again, and not leave off asking till our Request be granted: That is to say, if we are satisfied that the Thing we ask for is agreeable to God's Will to grant; if it be such a Thing as he has promised he will give, if we ask him for it. Thus it is said in the Place before cited, *Luke xviii. 1.* that our *Saviour spake a Parable to this purpose, that Men ought always to pray, and not to faint; i. e.* not to be discouraged, not to give over asking if their Suit be not presently granted, but to press the same Request over and over again; and, as the Prophet expresses it, *give God no Rest* until we obtain his Blessing. And this also, as I said, is clearly intimated in the Phrase used by our *Saviour* in the Text; *knock, and it shall be opened unto you; viz.* that we should not give over knocking till the Door be opened.

And so much may serve to have been spoken on the second Head, which was to explain the two Conditions or Qualifications of a prevailing Prayer, which are intimated in the Text, *viz.* 1. That it be earnest and urgent, *seek, and ye shall find:* And, 2. That it be constant and importunate; *knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

III. I proceed now to the third Thing proposed, which was, to discourse somewhat concerning the Fruit and Efficacy of Prayer, when it is so conditioned or qualified as it ought to be; or the Prevalency thereof for the obtaining of such Things as we want and pray for. *Ask, says our Saviour, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

And what better Fruit can we desire, what greater Efficacy of Prayer can we expect or hope for, than the having our Requests granted? *Ask, and ye shall receive; and, every one that asketh, receiveth.* Can more be said or done to encourage Prayer, than this? Certainly, if Observation and Experience did but confirm the Truth of these Promises; if we found it was always thus, that *every one that asketh, receiveth; i. e.* that by Prayer to God we could always obtain all that we wanted or desired; we should not be so backward to the Practice of this Duty as we generally are; and being as constant in it as we ought, we should not have such Cause to complain of our Wants and Miseries, as we think we have.

What shall we say then? Are not the Promises of God true? Is not God always as good as his Word? Yes, doubtless he is. But if he be, how then, you will say, does it come to pass, that we do not always receive the Things which we pray for? I answer,

1. Many Times the Cause of the Unsuccessfulness of our Prayers is in our selves, either because we are not fitly qualified to partake of the divine Blessing; for God, in dispensing his Favours, observes the Rule which our Saviour himself has given to Men, in the Verse before the Text; he *gives not his holy Things to Dogs, he casts not his Pearls before Swine*; he bestows not his choicest Favours upon such as understand not their Worth nor their Use; Or else the Reason may be, because there is some Fault in our Prayers, and they are not such as they should be; of which I have already spoken somewhat in this Discourse; and this Account St. James gives of the Matter, in *Jam. iv. 3. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.* But,

2. In case there be no Fault in our Prayers, and if we our selves are fitly qualified to receive the divine Blessing; then, I say, that the Promise of our Saviour, *ask, and ye shall receive*, is always made good to us, although we do not always receive just those very Things which we ask of God.

For it is to be considered, that many times even a good Man may be mistaken in the Matter of his Petition; he may think that those Things which he asks of God would be good for him, whereas indeed he had better be without them. And when the Case is thus, God hears and answers our Prayers in the best manner, when he refuses to give us those Things which we ask; especially if instead thereof he gives us that which is better, something which is really more for our Good than those Things which we had asked for. For thus a kind Father, when his Son asks Bread, never refuses it, because he knows it is necessary for him; but if he asks for a Thing, only because it is sweet to the Taste, but which the Father knows would poison him, or do him Hurt; the kindest Thing which a good Father can do in this Case, is to deny his Request, and to refuse to give him the Thing which he asks for, tho' he begs ever so hard and earnestly for it.

Now this is oftentimes our Case, especially when we pray for temporal good Things. We are often mistaken in the Matter of our own Petitions, and it may truly be said of us, as our Saviour says of the *two Disciples*, who had requested of him, *that one of them might sit on his right Hand, and the other on his left Hand, in his Kingdom*; *Ye know not what ye ask*, Matt. xx. 22. And therefore, in our Prayers for temporal Blessings, our Petitions should

should always be very humble and modest, and conditional; we may indeed with Modesty express our own Desire, but then at the same Time we should refer it wholly to God's Will and Wisdom, whether he will grant us that very Thing which we ask for or not; according to that Pattern of our Saviour, Matth. xxvi. 39. *O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* And thus much we may depend upon from our Saviour's Promise, even in this Case, *i. e.* in our Prayers for temporal Blessings, or Deprecation of temporal Evils; we may depend upon it, I say, that if we are such as God has promised to hear, and if our Prayers are so conditioned as they should be, even these Prayers will be heard and answered; that *if we ask, we shall receive*; if not that very Thing which we asked for, yet that which is really best for us to have. For we may be mistaken in what we ask, but God cannot be mistaken in what he gives; and therefore, what he gives in Return to the devout Prayers of good Men, if it be not the same Thing which they desired, we may be sure is better for them than that which they desired; and that was the best Answer to their Prayers which they could receive.

For indeed, whatever it is which we pray for in particular, the Sum of our Desire, to be sure, is, that we may be happy; that it may be well with us: This is what we mean, whatever it is that we say; and we beg this or that Thing in particular, only because the obtaining thereof would, in our Opinion, conduce very much to the making us happy. And therefore if we are mistaken in our Opinion, *i. e.* if it be really best for us not to have what we ask, it is an Act of Kindness in God not to give it us, tho' we ask for it; and it is no Breach of the Promise made in the Text, *ask, and ye shall receive*; for we do really receive what we ask, *i. e.* what we meant to ask, tho' thro' Ignorance we were mistaken in the Expression of our Desire, when we receive what is really best for us; for then we receive the End of our Desire, only we receive it not just in the same Way which we desired it: But the Reason of that was, because, as I said, we were mistaken in the Means of our Happiness, and what we thought would have conduced to our Happiness, would not really have conduced so much to it, as that which God was pleased to give us instead of the Thing which we asked for.

Thus when our Lord, in his Agony in the Garden, prayed that *if it was possible the Cup might pass from him*, *i. e.* that he might be delivered from that bitter and cruel Death which he had then a near Prospect of, the Author to the Hebrews observes that his Prayer was answered, Heb. x. 7. *When in the Days of his Flesh, he offered up Prayers and Supplications, with strong Crying and Tears, unto him that was able to save him from Death, he was heard in that he feared.* But how was he heard? How were his Prayers answered? Did the Cup pass away as he desired? Was he saved from the Death which he was afraid of? No: But he was heard in the best manner, when that bitter Death, which it was necessary he should undergo for the Redemption of Mankind, whose Peace with God he had undertaken to procure by suffering in their stead; when, I say, that bitter Death which he in his human Nature underwent, (for the Divinity could not suffer,) was made a Means of the Exaltation of that human Nature which suffered, to the highest Degree of Honour in Heaven. His Prayer, I say, was heard, and answered; tho' the Cup did not pass away, because it was better that the human Nature in Christ should so suffer, than that it should not be so exalted as it afterwards was for suffering: For, as St. Paul observes, Phil. ii. 8, *Ecce because being found in Fashion as a Man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross; therefore God also did highly exalt him, and give him a Name that is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every Knee should bow, of Things in Heaven, and Things on Earth, and Things under the Earth.* † † And

And such a Return as this we may expect to our own Prayers, for any temporal Blessing or Deliverance; I mean, if we and our Prayers are such as the Promises are made to. We may be confidently assured that our Prayers will be answered, in such manner as it is best for us they should be answered; perhaps not by granting us that temporal good Thing, or that Deliverance from temporal Evil, which we prayed for; but by so ordering Matters, that all Things which happen to us, whether prosperous or adverse, whether pleasant or painful, shall in the End be as good, or better for us than we ourselves did wish. For we know, as the *Apostle* says, *Rom. viii. 28. i. e.* we are so well assured of it, both from natural Reason, and express Revelation, that we may not improperly be said to know it; *that all Things do work together for Good to them that love God.*

Thus, if we ask, we shall receive; *i. e.* if our Prayer be for temporal good Things, we shall have what we ask for, or we shall have that which is better. God will be very good and gracious to us, tho' perhaps not just in that Way which we desired.

But in our Petitions for spiritual Blessings, and particularly for the Grace of God, to enable us to do his Will, we go upon surer Grounds; for this we know is for our Good; this we are sure is as necessary for the Support of our spiritual Life, as Bread is for the Sustenance of our Body; and what is necessary for us, we may be assured our heavenly Father will not deny us, if we are indeed his Children, and are diligent at all Times to ask for it. In this Case the Promise is express, and is to be literally understood, and will be punctually fulfilled: *Ask, and ye shall receive.* For, as our *Saviour* argues, *Luke xi. 13. If ye, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

We are sure that it is God's Will that we should walk in the Commandments of God, and serve him; and therefore since we cannot do this without God's special Grace, we are likewise sure that it is the Will of God to give us his Grace, if we are qualified to receive it, and are diligent in asking for it. And therefore, when we pray for the divine Grace, we may and ought to pray with a firm Belief that God will grant our Requests, and give us such Grace as is needful and sufficient for us; for he has promised that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that we may be able to bear it, *1 Cor. x. 13.* And what he has promised, we may confidently ask, because we may be sure it is agreeable to his Will to grant it. For, as the *Apostle* says, *1 Joh. v. 14, 15. This is the Confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his Will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the Petitions that we desired of him.*

To conclude all therefore: As, by what hath been said before, in the last Discourse, and in the former Part of this; we are instructed in the Nature, and directed in the Practice of this Duty of Prayer; so by what hath been now said concerning the Fruit and Efficacy of Prayer, we are very much encouraged to the constant and diligent Performance of it. For by what hath been now said, it plainly appears, that it is not more our Duty to pray, than it is our Privilege that we have Liberty allowed us, in all Cases, to make known our Requests to God. We ourselves should account it so; we should reckon it a very great Honour done us by an earthly King, to have free Access to his Presence at any Time, and a full Liberty granted us of making our Petitions to him, with a good Assurance, that if they were reasonable they should be obtained. Is it not then a much greater Privilege and Advantage, is it not a much higher Honour done us, that we have free Liberty given us to come into

the Presence of Almighty God, the great King of the World, whose Power and Goodness are infinite? Nay, that we are not only permitted, but likewise kindly invited by him, to ask for any Thing which we want; and that he has promised, graciously to receive our Petition, and to grant our Request, if it be a Request fit to be granted? *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

Having then this great Privilege allowed us, let us not lose or forfeit it, by Neglect or Disuse; but let us *come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in Time of Need*, as the *Apostle* exhorts, *Heb. iv. 16.* Let us diligently lay hold of, and improve, this blessed Advantage which God so graciously offers to us. Let us esteem Prayer, as indeed it is, our Privilege, rather than our Duty; and not go to it as to a Task and Burthen, but embrace it as a blessed Opportunity of receiving the greatest Good to our selves.

In fine: Let us follow the Advice of the *Apostle*, *Phil. iv. 6.* and in every Thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, make known our Requests to God; and then we shall not need to be anxiously careful for any thing our selves, but may securely depend upon him, that he will give us every Thing which we want, and order all Things to us for the best. For, as our Saviour adds, in the Words following the Text, *What Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will give him a Stone? Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is Heaven give good Things to them that ask him?* On which Argument or Motive to Prayer, I shall not now enlarge; because I design that for the Subject of my next Discourse.



DISCOURSE LXXVI.

Our Assurance of the Success of our Prayers.

MATTH. VII. 9, 10, 11.

Or what Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will he give him a Stone.

Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to them that ask him?



OUR Saviour, in the two Verses immediately foregoing, on which I discoursed the last Time; had exhorted his Disciples to earnest and constant Prayer to God, for a Supply of such Things as they should at any Time have need of; and had also encouraged the diligent Practice of that Duty, with a Promise that their devout and importunate Prayers would certainly be graciously heard and answered by God. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* On which most gracious Promise, being made in the Name of God, by him who gave the clearest Proof that he was sent by God to declare his Will, and to publish his Love to Mankind; and especially being given by him, who had not only received Authority from God to make the Promise, but also Power to fulfill it; for to him *all Power was given both in Heaven and Earth*: On which Promise therefore, I say, we might safely have relied, and should not have needed any other Assurance of the good Success of our Prayers, to encourage us to the constant and diligent Practice of the Duty. For we can desire no better Success of our Prayers, than to have our Petitions granted; and we cannot reasonably desire a better Assurance that our Petitions will be granted, than a Promise of God for it; and no Promise to this Purpose

could be more clearly and fully expressed than this is; *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth, &c.*

But such is the great Goodness of God, that in Compliance with our Weakness, to obviate all Scruples, and to remove from us all Doubting, he many Times condescends to do such Things, as one would think were beneath him to do, in order to give us the greatest Assurance possible of his Love and Kindness, and gracious Intentions towards us.

And therefore, though it be *impossible for God to lie*; and whoever knows any Thing of God, must know that it is so; yet he is graciously pleased sometimes to give us such farther Assurance of the Truth of his Promises, and of the Certainty of their Performance, as we should desire, in Case we had to deal with a Man who might deceive us, and on whose bare Promise alone we could not with Confidence depend.

Thus the Author to the *Hebrews* observes, that because a Promise confirmed with an Oath was ordinarily reckoned a greater Assurance than a bare Promise only; *an Oath for Confirmation is to Men an End of all Strife*; Heb. vi. 16. therefore, *God willing more abundantly to shew unto the Heirs of Promise the Immutability of his Counsel, confirmed it by an Oath; that by two immutable Things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong Consolation, who have fled for Refuge, to lay hold upon the Hope set before us*, ver. 16, 17, 18.

And such another Instance of the divine Condescension, tho' not just in the same Kind, we have in the Text. For,

Our Lord hath promised in the foregoing Verses, that *if we ask, we shall receive; that if we seek, we shall find; and that if we knock, it shall be opened unto us*. Encouragement sufficient to engage us in all our Wants and Distresses, to put up our Supplications to God with good Hope and Assurance of having our reasonable Requests granted; and yet, as if this had not been enough, he here in the Text proceeds to give us farther Assurance of the certain Accomplishment of this gracious Promise, by shewing that the Performance of it is very agreeable to the Goodness of the divine Nature; that what he has promised is no more than, considering the Power and Goodness of God, and the Relation wherein we stand to him, we might reasonably have expected from him, though he had not expressly promised it. So that our Hope of having our reasonable Petitions granted, is built upon a double Ground, *viz.* first the Truth, and then the Mercy and Goodness of God; either of which alone would have been sufficient to support such a Hope, and therefore much more are they both together abundantly sufficient to give us the fullest Assurance which can be desired, that our Prayers for such Things as are needful are always heard, and will be graciously answered by God. For, says our Saviour, *what Man is there of you, who if his Son ask Bread, will give him a Stone? or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to them that ask him.*

And indeed the Argument here used by our Saviour in the Text, is sufficient to give us the fullest Assurance, that all our reasonable Requests, of what Kind soever, whether for this Life or for the next, shall be granted, as will appear if we consider the Force and Strength of it, which consists in a Comparison made between God and Men in sundry Respects; every Word or Circumstance of which Similitude adds somewhat to the Strength of the Argument that is founded upon the whole. I shall consider distinctly these four Things: *

I. The Relation of *Paternity*, which is supposed in both Cases; in which Respect God is more truly *our Father* than Man was, and has a *nearer Relation* to all Men, and especially to all good Men, than their Fathers according to the Flesh have.

II. The *greater Knowledge* that there is in God, than is in Men, whereby he *knows* the *Wants* of his Children, and *how* to *supply* the same, better than any Man does.

III. The Power of God, infinitely superior to the Power of any earthly Father, whereby he is able to give to his Children every Thing which they want, which is more, many times, than earthly Fathers can do. And,

IV. And lastly; the Goodness of God, far beyond the Goodness of the best Men, and the kindest Fathers upon Earth; upon which Account he may justly be presumed more ready to do good to his Children than earthly Fathers are.

These four Things, I say, are either mentioned, or clearly implied in the Text, every one of which singly affords a just Ground of Hope, that whatsoever we reasonably desire of God in Prayer will be granted to us; and therefore much more do they all altogether give as good Assurance as can be desired, *that if we ask, we shall receive; that if we seek, we shall find; and that if we knock, it shall be opened unto us.*

I. I say, in this Comparison here made between God and Men, there is the same Relation of *Paternity* or *Fatherhood*, supposed in both Cases. *What Man is there of you, being a Father, who, if his Son ask Bread, will give him a Stone? i. e. What Father upon Earth is there, who will not give his Children, who ask him, such Things as are needful for him? How much more then shall your Father in Heaven, i. e. God, do the same?*

There is a very near Relation between a Father and his Child, and such a natural Affection grounded upon, and resulting from thence, that a Man is hardly able to deny the reasonable Request of his Child, even when he cannot grant it without great Inconvenience to himself; and therefore, tho' he has already Bread enough for his own Use, *i. e. as much Provision for Life as he himself can probably ever have Occasion for;* yet if he has not enough for his Children likewise, he is contented for their Sakes, and that he may have wherewith to supply their Wants, to toil and sweat, and take Pains to *rise early, and sit up late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness:* To maintain their Life he willingly exposes his own to all manner of Dangers by Sea and by Land, and thinks himself well recompensed for all the Labour which he takes, and all the Hazard which he runs, if he may but thereby get Bread for his Children. And if after all, by all the Care he can take, he be able to get nothing more than is just sufficient to serve himself and them for this Day, he as freely gives them their Share of it, as he himself takes his own; he will not suffer them, if he can help it, to starve to Day, though it may be his own Lot to starve with them to Morrow; but having enough for to Day, he willingly communicates what he has to them, and makes them partake with him of this Day's Provision; leaving the *Morrow to take Care for the Things of it self; i. e. trusting that he shall be as able to make necessary Provision for that Day, as he was for this; or resol-*

ved, though he should not, yet not to suffer his Children to want while he has any Thing to give.

Such is the natural Love and Affection of Parents to their Children. God therefore having the same Relation to us, he being *our Father*, and we *his Children*, it may reasonably be expected that, unless we forfeit his Kindness by our Undutifulness and Ingratitude, and provoke him, by our wilful Disobedience and Rebellion, to cast us off, he will bear the like kind Affection to us, and consequently will not refuse to give us whatever he knows necessary for us, if we ask it of him.

For it may be considered, and the Force of the Argument in the Text lies partly in this, that the *paternal Relation* between God and us is nearer than is between an earthly Father and his Son; upon which Account it may be reasonably be thought, that he bears a truer and more cordial Affection to us, than our earthly Fathers do; for they are only the Fathers of our *Flesh*, but he is the *Father of our Spirits*. And it is the Spirit, or Soul of a Man, which is properly the Man; it is the Soul only which feels Pain or Pleasure, though indeed by the Mediation of the bodily Senses. If therefore an earthly Father, who has no Relation but only to the Body of his Child, (to that Body which, without the Soul enlivening it, would not discern between Good and Evil, would not be capable of either Happiness or Misery;) does yet bear such a kind Affection to that which feels Pain or Pleasure, that is, to the Soul of his Child, only because it is nearly and intimately united to that Body of which he was the Father; may it not much rather be thought that God (the God and *Father of the Spirits of all Flesh*) bears a truer and heartier Affection to the Soul which he himself did breathe into the Body, after it had been made capable of being actuated and enlivened by it?

Or without considering the Distinction between Soul and Body, (the Soul, as the Man; and the Body, as the Means and Instrument of his Sensations and Actions;) if we take the whole together, and consider Soul and Body as essential Parts of that compound Being which we call Man; nay, and if we should farther suppose that the Soul is *ex traduce*, from the Parents, as well as the Body, yet still the Relation between a Father and his Son will not be so near as it is between God and every Man. For the earthly Parent is only the subordinate Means or Instrument, under God, of bringing his Children into Life and Being; it is God who is the Former and Maker of them; the Substance of which we were made was of God's Creation, and it was by his curious Art that we were contrived and moulded into the Form wherein we are. Our *Substance* (as the *Psalmist* speaks, *Psal. cxxxix. 15, 16.*) *was not hid from him, when we were made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest Parts of the Earth. His Eyes did see our Substance yet being imperfect, and in his Book all our Members were written, which in Continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* It was he also, who when he had formed the Body into human Shape, and framed and fitted all the Parts of it, (some of them so very small and fine, that they not only exceed human Power to form, but are too fine so much as to be discerned by human Eyes, nay even with the help of *Microscopes*;) it was he, I say, who then made that near and vital Union between Soul and Body, which we were so far from being able to make, that we are not able to give any Account of it now it is made. So that in Truth the admirable Power and Workmanship of God is as clearly discernable in bringing Men into Being in the Way of ordinary Generation, as it was in the Creation of the first Man out of the Dust of the Ground, only it being common, we take no Notice of it. For this is our Way, what is rare and unusual, strikes us with

Admiration;

Admiration; but the same, or a stranger Thing, if it be common, if it be what we see every Day, we pass over without Observation.

Seeing then that God is more truly our Father than Man; if that small Part which the Parent has in bringing his Child into Being, produces such strong Affection towards it, that he cannot but love it, and desire its Welfare, and contribute what in him lies towards it; can it be thought that God does not likewise bear a fatherly Affection to the Creatures which he has made, to the Work of his own Hands? If then a Father will not refuse Bread to his hungry Child, when he has it to give, and the Child asks it of him; how can we fear that God should deny the reasonable Requests of the same Person, who is much more his Child, than he was his earthly Father's; especially if the same Person be the Child of God, not only by Creation, but likewise by Adoption and Grace, and being (as the *Apostle* speaks,) *begotten again unto a lively Hope*, behaves himself dutifully and obediently towards him; and is (as the same *Apostle* exhorts) *a Follower of God, as a dear Child ought to be?*

II. Another Thing observable, in the Comparison here made by our *Saviour* between God and an earthly Father, upon which he grounds his Argument to persuade us of the Truth and certain Accomplishment of the Promise he had before made, *Ask, and ye shall receive*; is the greater Knowledge that there is in God, than is in Men, whereby he knows the Wants of his Children, and how to supply the same better than any Man does. If (says our *Saviour*,) *ye know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall God give good Things to those that ask him? i. e.* he knows how to do this much better than earthly Parents do.

Now there is no earthly Parent but knows the Difference between *Bread* and a *Stone*, between a *Fish* and a *Serpent*; and if his Son asks him for the former, *i. e.* for *Bread*, or a *Fish*, he gives it him, because he knows these to be good for Food, and that Food is necessary to preserve Life. And on the other side, if the Son thro' a childish Mistake should, when he is hungry, ask for a *Stone* instead of *Bread*, *i. e.* should ask for something which was altogether unprofitable, and would not answer his End in asking for it; and much rather if he should ask for a *Serpent* instead of a *Fish*, *i. e.* for something, which if he had it would do him Hurt rather than Good. The Father, in this Case, would only pity the Ignorance of his Child, and give him that which he should, and that which, if he had been wiser, he would have asked for, and not that Thing which he did desire.

But the Wisdom of God does infinitely more exceed ours, than the Wisdom of any Father does that of his Child; we may be sure, therefore, that he knows better how to give good Gifts to us than we know how to do it to our Children; we may be sure that he understands better, even than we our selves do, whether our Requests are fit to be granted. And therefore, if we have not what we asked for, we may reasonably conclude that we were mistaken in our Petition; and that what God does give us in answer to our Prayers, is really better for us than that which we our selves did desire. *Your Father knoweth what Things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* So our *Saviour* had told us, in the eighth Verse of the foregoing Chapter. If therefore he had known that those Things which we asked were needful for us; being our Father, he would not have denied them; and if he has not given us what we asked, but somewhat else, we may be sure that what he gave was more needful, more profitable for us, than what we would have had.

III. Another Thing which I proposed to consider, in the Comparison here made

made by our *Saviour* between God and Men, is the Power of God, infinitely superior to the Power of any earthly Father, whereby he is able to give to his Children every Thing which they want, which is more, many times, than earthly Fathers can do. And this is another very good Ground of Assurance that *if we ask, we shall receive*; because he is able to do for us as much or more than we ask. *If ye, says our Saviour, i. e. ye, who are but Men; ye, who are but of small Power; ye, who have but little to give; yet know how to give good Gifts unto your Children; i. e. are able nevertheless to give necessary Food to your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, i. e. who is above all, who has all Power in his Hands, how much more shall he give good Things to them that ask him?*

For it cannot be supposed that a Father, if indeed he has the Affection of a Father, should refuse to his Son any Thing that he needs, or does reasonably desire, unless it be either because he has it not to give, or because he cannot part with it without great Inconvenience to himself; and for one of these Reasons, a Son's Prayer to his earthly Father may be sometimes without Success; he may beg even for Bread, and his Father may have none to give him; or perhaps may not have sufficient for himself; and though he loves his Son well, yet may love himself better; or his Son may ask some other Thing of him, which, though it be in his Power to give, he could not give, at least not in so great a Measure as his Son desires, without prejudicing his other Children, for whom he has a like Affection, and too much lessening their Portion.

The Question which was put by *Esau*, to his Father *Isaac*, when his Brother *Jacob* had come by Subtilty, and taken away his Blessing, Gen. xxvii. 38. *Hast thou but one Blessing, my Father? Bless me, even me also, O my Father.* This Question, I say, and Petition, is what a great many Parents can answer only in the negative; they had but one Blessing, and that they have given away already. By their Kindness to one Son they may have disabled themselves from doing the like, or indeed any considerable Kindness to another Son, who had as much Reason to desire and expect it from him.

But these can never be the Reasons of our heavenly Father's not granting our Petitions; for he, who has all Power in his Hands, can never want Power to do us all the Good which we can desire; and he, whose Riches are infinite and boundless, can never want to give to any Person who asks him, what he has already given to another; his Store is inexhaustible, and how much soever he gives to one, he has as much remaining as he had before, to give to any other of his Children that makes the same Request. To him therefore, as to a constantly overflowing Fountain, we may at all Times go, without Fear of ever returning back without quenching our Thirst: To him we may, in every Thing, i. e. in all our Wants or Distresses, by Prayer and Supplication make known our Requests, and be sure that if they should not be answered according to our Desire, the Reason cannot be because they could not, but only because they were not fit to be in such Manner answered. But,

IV. Lastly; there is in the Comparison here made by our *Saviour* between God and Men, another Difference taken Notice of, which renders our Prayers to God much more hopeful, than the Prayers of any Son are, or can be, to his earthly Father; and that is, in their Goodness, which is not in all Men so great as it appears to be; which in the best Men of all is limited and finite; but in God, is infinite and boundless, far beyond the Goodness of the best Men, and the kindest Fathers upon Earth: Upon which Account he may justly be presumed more ready to do good to his Children, than any earthly Fathers are. And it is this Difference that our *Saviour* in the

the Text seems to lay the greatest Stress upon. *If ye, says he, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven (who is good, for this must be understood to be implied, tho' it be not mentioned; how much more shall your heavenly Father, who is good,) give good Things to them that ask him? i. e. If you can and do reasonably expect Good from those who are Evil, with much greater Reason may you expect to receive Good from him who is good, from him who is the Fountain of all Good, from him who is Goodness itself.*

For this is the Truth of the Case: All Men are evil; more or less, they are all so; *there is none good but one, that is, God, says our Saviour, Mat. xix. 17. i. e. there is none perfectly and completely so, but only God.* In all Men there is a Mixture of Evil; nay comparatively with God, the Angels themselves are not good, *Job xv. 15. the holy Angels are impure, the Heavens are not clean, the Stars are not pure in his Sight, Job xxv. 5. and his Angels he chargeth with Folly, Job iv. 18.* So we are told in the Book of Job, Ch. xv. 14. *What then is Man, that he should be clean? And he that is born of a Woman, that he should be righteous?* But God is good; he is essentially so, and therefore he is always so. *With him there is no Variableness, nor so much as a Shadow of turning,* as St. James says, Ch. i, ver. 17.

All Men, even the best of Men, are evil, in the same Sense wherein the Psalmist says, *All Men are Liars.* In which Words it is not implied that there never is any Truth in Men, but only that they are not necessarily true and faithful; that it is not impossible that every Man should be a Liar, and therefore not improbable that a great many are so; and because they may lye, we cannot be certainly assured that they do not lye: We may be deceived, in trusting in those whom we think the most faithful. And so, I say here, all earthly Parents are evil, altho' some of them do, in fact, love their Children most dearly, and would not deny them any thing that is reasonable; yet there are some others, of whom this cannot be truly said: And even they who are good might have been otherwise; and there are few or none so perfectly good, as to be clearly exempt from all Spice of Envy, or Malice, or vitious Self-Love, which may be in some Degree prejudicial to the true Interest of their Children. But God is all Love and Goodness; there is no Mixture of Envy or Malice in him; he truly desires the Welfare of all his Children, of all his Creatures; *his tender Mercy is over all his Works,* and he can never be so much as tempted to evil. If therefore from earthly Parents, such as they generally are, either evil, or at least liable to be so, Children may nevertheless, and generally do expect, to have their reasonable Petitions granted, much more may we well expect the same from God, whose Goodness is infinite, who is always as kind and gracious to all his Creatures, as a just and wise Being can be; and therefore this is made by St. James a good Encouragement to us, to put up our Requests to him, with Assurance of Success, *Jam. i. 5. If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.* Having to deal with such a tender, gracious, and compassionate Father, we may well, as the Author to the Hebrews exhorts, *Heb. iv. 13. come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in Time of need.* We can have no Reason to fear that God will ever deny us any Thing that is fit for us to ask, or for our Good to receive. *For if ye, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?*

But this Argument, taken from the Consideration of the Knowledge, and Power, and Goodness of God, and of that near Relation which as a Father

he bears to us, tho' it be urged here by our *Saviour* to no other Purpose but only to beget in us Faith and a good Assurance in Prayer, and a full Confidence that the Promise he had made in the foregoing Words, *ask, and ye shall receive*, shall be punctually fulfilled; might be urged to several other good Purposes. And therefore, I hope, it will not be thought a Digression from the Text; or if it be a Digression, I hope it may be an useful one; before I put an End to my Discourse upon these Words, briefly to mention three or four very common Cases, wherein the Consideration of God's fatherly Relation to us, and of the greater Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness, that are in God our heavenly Father, than are in any Father upon Earth (which must be granted to be true, or else it must be said that our *Saviour's* Argument in the Text is weak and faulty; wherein, I say, the Consideration of these Truths, which the Text suggests to us, and which I have in the foregoing Discourse laid before you) may serve to afford great Content and Comfort to our Minds, But I fear I should be too tedious, if I should do this now; and therefore I shall defer it to another Opportunity.



DISCOURSE LXXVII.

The Grounds of our Assurance of the
Success of our Prayers.

MATTH. VII. 9, 10, 11:

*Or what Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask
Bread, will he give him a Stone?*

Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent?

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good Gifts
unto your Children, how much more shall your Fa-
ther which is in Heaven give good Things to them
that ask him?*



OUR Saviour in the two Verses immediately foregoing, had exhorted his Disciples to earnest and constant Prayer to God, for all such Things as they should have Need of; and had also encouraged the diligent Practice of that Duty, with a Promise that their devout and importunate Prayers would certainly be graciously heard and answered by God: *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* And on this plain Promise we might safely rely.

But such is the great Goodness of God, that in Compliance with our Weakness, to obviate all Scruples, and to remove from us all Doubting, he many Times condescends to do such Things as one would think were beneath him to do, in order to give us the greatest Assurance which is possible of his Love and Kindness, and gracious Intentions towards us.

Thus the *Author* to the *Hebrews* observes, that because a Promise confirmed with an Oath was ordinarily reckoned among Men a greater Assurance than a bare Promise only; therefore God, *willing more abundantly to shew unto the Heirs of Promise the Immutability of his Counsel, confirmed it by an Oath; that by two immutable Things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong Consolation, who are fled for Refuge to lay hold upon the Hope set before us.*

And it is such another Instance of the divine Condescension, tho' not just in the same Kind, which we have in the Text; wherein our *Saviour* (as if there might be some reasonable Doubt made of the Truth of this bare Promise) appeals to our own Reason, and, as it were, bids us to be Judges our own selves, whether the Promise he had before made, had not been such as we might reasonably expect should be performed. For to encourage us to ask, he had told us before, that *if we ask, it shall be given us*; and to give us Assurance of the Truth of this, he here shews, that what he had promised before in the Name of God, was no more than may be looked for, even from a good Man; and what a good Man, nay, what a Man that was *evil* would do in a like Case, that, he says, it is highly unreasonable to fear that God will not do. *For what Man is there of you, says our Saviour, who, if his Son asks Bread, will he give him a Stone? or, if he asks a Fish, will he give him a Serpent? If ye then being evil know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to them that ask him?*

The Force and Strength of which Argument consists, as I have already shewn, in a Comparison made between God and Men, in sundry Respects; every Word or Circumstance of which Similitude adds somewhat to the Strength of the Argument which is founded thereupon.

1. He makes a Comparison between God and Men in the *Relation* wherein God stands to us, as he is our *Father*. Now in those who are Fathers upon Earth, we see there is always so much Love and Kindness to their Children, that they readily give them, when they ask it, any good Thing which is in their Power to give: God therefore having the same Relation to us; *for we are all his Offspring*, as the *Apostle* says; we may very reasonably believe, that he will as readily give us the good Things which we need, upon our asking them, as an earthly Father gives the same to his Children.

2. He makes a Comparison between God and Men, as to their *Knowledge*, which is infinitely greater in God than it is in Men. If therefore even a Man knows what Things are good for his Child, and readily gives him those Things which he knows are good for him; much more may we be sure that God knows what is good for every one of us, and is ready to do for us that which is best.

3. He makes a Comparison between God and Men, as to their *Power*, which in Men upon Earth is very small, but in God our *heavenly Father* is infinite and unlimited. If therefore Men, who are but of little Power, are yet commonly able to supply the Needs of their Children, how much more is God, whose Power is infinite, whose Riches are inexhaustible?

4. Lastly, He makes a Comparison between God and Men, as to their *Goodness*, which in God is far beyond the Goodness of the best Men, and of the kindest Fathers upon Earth. Upon which account he may justly be presumed more ready to do Good to his Children than earthly Fathers are; *If ye, says he, being evil, (for so the best Fathers upon Earth are, in Comparison with God; if ye being evil,) know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, (who is Good, who is infinite in Goodness; how much more shall he) give good Things to them that ask him?*

But I have already observed, that this same Argument, taken from the Consideration of the Knowledge, and Power, and Goodness of God, and of that near Relation which, as our Father, he bears to us, tho' it be urged here by our *Saviour*, to no other Purpose, but only to beget in us Faith, and a good Assurance in Prayer, and a full Confidence that the Promise which he had made in the foregoing Words, *Ask, and ye shall receive*, shall be punctually fulfilled; might also be urged to several other good Purposes.

I hope therefore it will not be thought a Digression from the Text; or if it be so thought, I hope however it may be reckoned an useful Digression; now, while I am discoursing on these Words, to mention briefly three or four very common Cases, wherein the Consideration of God's fatherly Relation to us, and of the greater Wisdom, Power and Goodness which are in God, our heavenly Father, than are in any Father upon Earth (which must be granted to be true, or else it must be said that our *Saviour's* Argument in the Text is weak and faulty; wherein, I say, the Consideration of these Truths which the Text suggests to us, and which I have in my former Discourse laid before you) may serve to afford great Content and Comfort to our Minds.

This therefore is what I purpose now to do. And,
1. The Consideration of these Truths, that God is infinitely wise, and powerful, and gracious, and bears a tender and fatherly Affection to us, may serve fully to assure us of the Falsity of the Doctrine of *absolute Reprobation*; whatever Arguments are urged for the Proof of it, or howsoever some few Texts of Scripture, as they have been expounded, or rather wrested, by some Persons, may seem to favour it.

For not to mention now those many and plain Texts of Scripture which are on the other Side; by the express Words of which, or by plain Consequences from which, that Doctrine may be clearly refuted; which would indeed be too great a Digression from the Text, and be also a Subject too large to be handled in one Sermon; I would only desire those who are of that Opinion, and are uneasy in the Thoughts of it, as I think indeed they must needs be, unless they are either very sanguine, or very self-conceited; I would only desire them, I say, to take into their serious Consideration the Argument urged in the Text by our *Saviour*, though indeed by him here to another Purpose: For if the Ground of the Argument be true and good, it is as good to one Purpose as to another. I would desire therefore, I say, to know, what Opinion they themselves would have of an earthly Father who should deal so by his Children, as the Maintainers of that Doctrine do hold God deals by the Race of Mankind, who are indeed all of them the Children of God by their Creation, more than they are the Children of their earthly Parents by Generation; for in him, as the Apostle says, *Acts xvii. 28. we live, and move, and have our Being; for we are also his Offspring.* What would they think of a Father, who before his Children were born, before they had done, or were capable of doing, Good or Evil, should peremptorily resolve within himself to destroy, or make away, such a Proportion of them; a third, suppose, or a fourth, or a fifth Part of them; or who, if he did suffer them to live a while, should resolve however to take no manner of Care of them, to cast them out, and expose them naked and helpless; by which means they should as certainly perish, as if they had been made away with at first, and strangled in the Birth? Would they think this Man a good Father? Would they think he deserved the Name of a Father? Would they not rather think that he divested himself of all Humanity, and was indeed worse than the worst of Brutes, tho' under the Shape of a Man?

And yet this Case does by no means reach or come up to the other; for what Comparison is there between Pain, and Hardship, or a temporal Death, the only Evils this Father did, or could, expose his Children to; and the eternal Torments of Hell, to which they who are reprobated are adjudged? And I shall not need to tell you farther, that they who hold the absolute Decree of Reprobation, suppose a much greater Proportion of Mankind to be absolutely reprobated than a fifth, a fourth, or even a third Part; for they generally suppose, that there is not above one in an hundred who is not so.

How then can we think such dealing of God with his Creatures consistent with that kind and loving Affection which we are told by our *Saviour* in the Text he bears to them? Certainly we may alter the Argument in the Text a little; and yet with such an Alteration it must be allowed to hold as good as in the Case in which our *Saviour* here makes use of it. "If ye, tho' ye be evil, yet do not murder and destroy your Children; do not take Delight in putting them to Grief and Pain; do not resolve beforehand, that, whether they shall deserve well or ill at your Hands, you will so plague and torment them, that they should much better not have been born; much less can it be supposed that God, your heavenly Father, who is infinitely kind and gracious, will deal in like manner with any of you; and much less still, with most of you; and that he does so order Things by a peremptory and unconditionate Decree, (a Decree grounded only on his own Will and Pleasure, not made with any Regard to your future Behaviour) that after the utmost you can do to please him, it should yet go as hard with you, as if you had done all you could to provoke him."

Fear not then that there is any such absolute and unconditionate Decree for the Reprobation of the greatest Part of Mankind, or indeed of so much as one single Person of the whole Race of Men; since you cannot believe such a Decree, and yet believe at the same Time, that God is a kind, loving and gracious Father to all his Creatures: For you cannot, I think, I'm sure I cannot believe, that he is kind, loving and gracious to those whom he reprobates, who yet, as being created by him, were his Children no less than others; who were, plainly, more truly and properly his Children, than any Man is the Child of his earthly Father. Fear not then but that as he is indeed your Father, so he is also kind and loving, and bears a true fatherly Affection to you: Fear not that he will ever disinherit you, and cast you off, if you are careful and diligent to please him. And much less shall you need to fear that he has done this already, before he so much as began to make Trial of you; that he reprobated you to eternal Death, before he had given you Life. Believe what the wise *Hebrew* says, *Wisd. xi. 24.* that *God loveth all Things that are, and abhorreth nothing that he hath made*, for he proves it by a good Argument, for never would he have made any Thing if he had hated it: Or, if you will not believe him, because an *Apocryphal Writer*, believe *St. Paul*, who tells you to the same Purpose, *1 Tim. ii. 4.* that *God would have all Men to be saved*. Believe *St. Peter*, who tells you, *2 Pet. iii. 9.* that *God is not willing that any should perish*. At least, if you will not believe them, believe God himself, saying as he does, *Ezek. xviii. 32.* *I have no Pleasure in the Death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God*; believe him, at least, when he does not only declare it, but also confirms his Declaration by an Oath; to the Intent, as the *Author* to the *Hebrews* says in a like Case, *that by two immutable Things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong Consolation*. Believe him, I say, confirming this gracious Declaration by an Oath, as he does, *Ezek. xxxiii. 11.* *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked; but that the Wicked turn from his Way, and live*. There is not, I am confident, any one Place of Scripture, affirming that the Judgment which God will pass upon Men at the last Day, is grounded upon his own absolute and unconditionate Decree, made concerning them before they were born; but the whole Tenor of the Scripture is of another Strain, viz. that God will render to every Man according to his Works; and that when we shall all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, every Man shall receive the Things done in his Body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

But

But this, it may be you will say, affords but little Comfort to us; for if this be indeed true, that at the great Day of Reckoning, *every Man shall receive according as his Works have been*, it will be even as bad with the greatest Part of Mankind, as if they had been reprobated by an eternal Decree, made without any Consideration at all of their Behaviour; for *there is not, as the Scripture tells us, a just Man upon Earth, that doeth Good and sinneth not*; there is *none that can say, I have made my Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin*; so that if God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, none could stand before him.

And this indeed is true; it must be granted, that if God should enter into strict Judgment with us, no Man living could be justified in his Sight, as the Psalmist says: But then I say, that the Consideration of the Argument here urged by our Saviour in the Text, to assure us of God's Readiness to hear our Prayers, affords us also very good Consolation in this Case. And this is another good Purpose for which it may serve; Namely,

2. To bear us up under those manifold Infirmities which the best of us all, after all the Care we can take, do find our selves every Day liable to. And surely it must needs afford us very great Consolation in this Case, to consider, that we have to do, not with a rigorous Judge, but with a most gracious and compassionate Father; for being our Father, we may be confident that he bears a fatherly Affection to us; and consequently, that, as the Psalmist argues, *Psal. ciii. 13, 14. Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our Frame, he remembreth that we are Dust.*

For what Father upon Earth is there who does not consider the Age and Strength of his Children, so as to require nothing more of them than they are able to do? What earthly Father is there, who if his Son shews a good Will to obey him in all Things, does not accept of the Will for the Deed, in those Instances wherein he knows his Son had not Power and Strength to do what he was bidden? What Father is there, who chastises, as great Faults, the childish Mistakes and Follies of his Children, when, considering their Ignorance and Infirmary, it could not be reasonably expected that they should do better than they do? Who is there who does not make reasonable Allowances for the Infancy and Weakness of his Children, and is not content that, while they are in their Childhood, they should understand as Children, and think as Children, and speak as Children, and do as Children? If then God be our Father, and bears a fatherly Affection to us, as we are assured in the Text he does; for it is from this Principle that our Saviour argues; we may be assured that he also will judge of us, and deal with us, no otherwise than as a Father would do. I do not mean, as some foolish and over-indulgent Fathers do, who are so fond of their Children as to spoil them; but as a kind, and yet withal a wise Father would do; who truly desires the Welfare of his Children, and takes wise and just Methods to promote it. If he be our Father, we may be assured, as the Prophet Malachi says, *Mal. iii. 17. that he will spare us, as a Man spareth his own Son that serveth him*; especially, being also assured that he is a very tender and compassionate Father, we may be confident that tho' in Justice he might, yet his Goodness is such that he will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss; but that he will consider our Frailty, and have Compassion on our Infirmities: And if there be a willing Mind, and an honest and obedient Heart, will accept of such Service as we can give, tho' it be not so much nor so good as he ought to have.

So that this Consideration, tho' it gives no just Encouragement to such as sin thro' Wilfulness and Presumption; for the best Father may severely chastise an undutiful Son, in order to amend him; nay, and he may also, if he finds him obstinate and incorrigible, disinherit him for his Disobedience; and

if

if he be a wise Man he must do so, to preserve his Authority from Contempt, and by the Terror of that Example to keep his other Children in a dutiful Subjection to him. This Consideration then, I say, tho' it gives no Encouragement to such, yet does indeed yield great and strong Consolation to those who offend only thro' Ignorance or Weakness, and not of malicious Wickedness. For their Father being their Judge, they may be sure they shall find him as merciful to them as he can be with Justice and Truth; they may consequently be well assured, that they shall not be condemned by him their heavenly Father, for such Over-sights, Slips, and Infirmities, as they themselves would pass by, and pardon, in their own Children; and also, that for their other greater Faults, if they heartily repent of them, they shall find him, their heavenly Father, as ready to forgive them, as they themselves would be to forgive the like Faults in their own Children, returning to their Obedience, and begging their Forgiveness.

3. This same Consideration, that God is our Father, may likewise serve to comfort us, and to bear up our Spirits under all the Afflictions and Adversities of this mortal Life.

And great Need indeed we have of somewhat to comfort us, and to support our Spirits, while we are going thro' this *Vale of Misery*. For *Man is born unto Trouble, as the Sparks fly upwards*, as we are told, *Job v. 7*. And the Truth of this Saying we every one of us find and feel, every Day we live, by our own sad Experience. The real Trouble and Vexation of human Life is indeed very great; but then the fearful Consideration of what Trouble we do and must undergo in this Life adds not a little to it, and makes us commonly pass our Days here more sorrowfully than otherwise we should need to do.

But the Reason of all our Uneasiness under what we either fear or feel, is because we do not consider wisely of the Matter; we look upon the Troubles we undergo here only as our unhappy Lot or Destiny, and do not, as we ought to do, consider the Hand of God therein: If we did, we should soon see Reason to be contented with our Lot, and should be mightily comforted under all our Labours and Afflictions. For *Affliction does not come forth out of the Dust, neither does Trouble spring out of the Ground*; but there is a directing Hand of Providence in every Thing which befalls us; and he who orders our Lot, and puts us into that Condition which we are in, whatever it be, is, as we are assured in the Text, our Father; our gracious and merciful Father, who has more Kindness for us than our earthly Parents have. We may be sure therefore, that *he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*; we may be sure that those Afflictions which befall us, are more for our Good, than an uninterrupted State of Ease and Pleasure would be.

And this Argument is very well urged, by the *Author* to the *Hebrews*, to this Purpose, in *Heb. xii. 5, &c.* *My Son, despise not thou the Chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth. If ye endure Chastening, God dealeth with you as with Sons; for what Son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without Chastening, whereof all are Partakers, then are ye Bastards and not Sons. Furthermore, we have had Fathers of our Flesh which corrected us, and we gave them Reverence, shall we not much rather be in Subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live? For they verily for a few Days chastened us after their own Pleasure, but he for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness. Now no Chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.* Well may we bear with Patience, and Submission to the Will of God, all the Adversities of this mortal Life, if we believe, as the

Truth

Truth is, that they are ordered to us by the Disposition of a wise and gracious Father; who means Good to us in all he does, and knows what is for our Good much better than we do: So that *these light Afflictions which are but for a Moment*, shall certainly, unless it be thro' our own Fault, *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*. But,

4. Lastly, There is nothing in this World so apt to disquiet Men, as Carefulness and Concern about their Children; especially in case their own Circumstances and Condition in the World are so streight and low, that not only they have no Prospect of making a future Provision for their Children, but also have scarcely wherewithal to find them in Necessaries even at present. Nay, so great and so afflicting is the Concern of some Parents about this Matter, that the melancholy Consideration of the Want and Necessity which their Children are likely to be in, after they shall be gone out of the World, breaks their Strength, and impairs their Health, and hastens their Death, and so by a natural Efficacy brings those Evils upon their Children which they feared, much sooner than otherwise, according to the natural Course of Things, they would have happened to them.

But the Argument here urged by our *Saviour*, viz. that God is a kind and loving Father to us all, and that we may reasonably expect from him, whatever we might expect, or indeed much more than we could expect, even from the kindest Father upon Earth, affords an excellent and sovereign Remedy for this Evil also; a Remedy which is specifick, which has a peculiar Fitness and Propriety to cure Men of such Fears, and to give them Ease under such Apprehensions. For consider, I pray,

Your Children indeed are yours, you were the Means and Instruments, under God, of bringing them into this Life; and for that Reason, if you have Power in your Hands, it is your Duty, as well as a natural Expression of fatherly Affection to your Children, not only to give them a present Maintenance while you live, but also to provide, as well as you can, for their future Subsistence, after you shall be taken from them; if not by leaving them somewhat to live upon, at least by breeding them up to some honest Employment, whereby they may be enabled to get their own Living. And therefore the *Apostle* says truly, 1 *Tim.* v. 8. that *if any Man provide not for his own, he hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel*: And in 2 *Cor.* xii. 14. he teaches, that *Parents ought to lay up for their Children*; i. e. if they can do it; if they have any Overplus remaining after the present necessary Charges of maintaining themselves and their Families are defrayed.

But then you are withal to consider, that your Children are not only yours, but God's also; they are his Children more truly and properly than they are yours; never fear then, but if God has not put it into your Power to make such Provision for them as you would desire, he will take Care to provide for them as well some other Way: For he has a nearer Relation to them than you your selves have; and he has all Power in his Hands, and can do them as much Good as he pleases, and in that Way which is best for them. If therefore you who are *evil*, would nevertheless give, if you had to give, to your Children whatsoever was necessary for them; never fear, but that God, who is *good*, who is infinitely *good*, who is *good unto all*, and whose *tender Mercies are over all his Works*, will much rather do the same. He will not, it may be, put them into a State of so great Plenty of all worldly Goods as you could wish; and yet this perhaps he may do; we see Instances every Day, of great Estates raised from nothing, and the Children of the Poor living in all Plenty and Abundance, while at the same Time many who had great Estates left them do come to suffer Want. But if God should not deal thus by your Children; which tho' it may be, yet is not a Thing to be expected or depended upon; he may deal better by them, for it may be better for them

not to be rich and great : And you have no Reason to doubt, but that he, who bears them as true a Love as you can do, will do for them that which is best.

Your only Care therefore is ; and the chief Care indeed it is, or ought to be, of all Parents, but yours it is most especially; who can do nothing else for your Children; to breed them up well, in the Fear of God, in the Practice of Religion, and in Temperance and Sobriety; for by this you will give them a double Title to God's Blessing; one, as they are his Children by Creation, and another, as they will be then his Children by Adoption and Grace, and by a near Resemblance to him their heavenly Father in all his imitable Perfections. Let it be your Care and Business then, to make your Children such as the Promises both of this Life and of the next are made to, and then never fear but that God will make good his Promises to them; and that if they shall be careful and diligent to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, all these Things, i.e. all Things necessary for this Life, shall be added* unto them. Let it be your Care, as it is your Duty, to *bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*, and in the Fear of his holy Name; and by this you will make a better Provision for them, than you could do by leaving them a great Estate. For they, who love God, will be loved by God, and there is no Want to them who love and fear him, *Psal. xxxiv. 9. 10. The young Lions do lack and suffer Hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good Thing. The Lord is a Light and a Shield; the Lord will give Grace and Glory, and no good Thing shall he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Psal. lxxxiv. 11. For if ye, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?*

I shall conclude all with the Collect for the Day.

Let thy merciful Ears, O Lord, be open to the Prayers of thy humble Servants; and that they may obtain their Petitions, make them to ask such Things as shall please thee, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.



DISCOURSE LXXVIII.

To do, as you would be done unto,
explained and recommended.

MATTH. VII. 12.

Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.



THE Word *therefore*, at the Beginning of the Verse, intimates some Connexion between these Words, and those immediately foregoing; altho' yet the Subject Matter here treated of be not only not the same, but of a quite different Sort and Kind, from what had been treated of just before. For there, in the five foregoing Verses, the Subject was *Prayer to God*; here, it is *Justice and Equity* in our Dealings with Men.

Nevertheless the Connexion may easily enough be made out. For after our Saviour had exhorted to Prayer, at the seventh and eighth Verses, he, in the three Verses immediately foregoing the Text, had argued the Readiness of God to answer our Prayers, from that Readiness which is observed in all earthly Parents to grant the reasonable Requests of their Children: *If ye being evil know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?* The Ground of which Argument is this, that all God's Dispensations are agreeable to Reason; that he always does that himself, which he approves of when done by others in the like Cases. It being therefore his Will and Commandment, and what he likes well of, that Parents should love their Children, and provide for and maintain them in such manner as they are able, and not deny their reasonable Requests; it may be surely depended upon, that he, who is our heavenly Father, will express his fatherly Affection to us his Children in the same Manner. *How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to them, i. e. to his Children, that ask him?*

And then it follows; *therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them; i. e.* since this is God's Method of dealing with his Creatures, it ought also to be yours in dealing with one another:

another: As he always does that to them, which he judges fit for them, being in the like Circumstances or Relations, to do to others; so should you, what you judge fit that others, who are in such Circumstances or so related to you, should do to you; that you, being in the like Circumstances, or in the same Manner related to others, should do to them. Your Judgment in one Case should be the Rule of your Practice in the other; the Cases being really the same.

And what an excellent and comprehensive Rule this is, we are taught in the last Clause of the Text; *this is the Law and the Prophets*. That is, this one Direction is equivalent to all the Precepts of the second Table: It comprehends in it all the particular Rules which are any where given by *Moses*, or the *Prophets*, for the Regulation of your Behaviour towards, and Dealings with, one another: So that if ye do but observe well this one Rule, and be but careful in all Things *to do to others as ye would they should do to you*; as you will need no other Rule for your Direction, so neither will you be wanting to any Obligation which you lie under to other Men. This one general Rule, well remembred, rightly understood, and wisely applied, will serve instead of all the particular Directions which ever have been, or which can be, given to Men, to instruct them in their Duty towards one another. *All Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets*.

In discoursing on which Words I shall do these three Things.

I. I shall explain the Rule, and shew how it is to be used and applied.

II. I shall shew the manifold Usefulness of having this Rule always in our Mind, and ready at hand for our Direction. And,

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to persuade you, in all your Negotiations with one another, always to act according to this Rule; *to do to others, as ye would they should do to you*.

I. I shall explain the Rule, and shew how it is to be used and applied. *Whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*.

And the only Difficulty is in the Word, *would*; *whatsoever ye would*, Πάντα ὅσα ἂν θέλοιτε, which may be understood in a *laxer*, or in a more restrained Sense. 1. It may be understood in a *laxer* Sense; as if it had been said, *whatsoever ye would wish or desire might be done to you by others*; or, 2. in a more restrained Sense, taking the Will here spoken of, not for the *Will of the Affections*, but for the *Will of the Judgment or Approbation*; as if it had been said, *whatsoever, when done by others to you, you approve of in your Judgment, and think was done well, rightly, and as it ought to be*; that do ye also to others. And a little Consideration of the Matter will be sufficient to shew, in which of these two Senses we are to understand the Word, *would*, in this Place. For,

1. Taking the Word here in the *laxer* Sense, and understanding by the θέλημα, or θέλω, the Will here spoken of, the *Will of the Affections*, and by the Thing willed, what we should wish or desire might be done to us, without regard to the Fitness or Reasonableness of the Thing it self; it is evident that the Rule so understood, as if it had been said, *whatsoever ye would wish or desire might be done to you, do ye even so to others*, would be so far from being an excellent Rule of Justice or Charity, that, on the contrary, it would in some Cases be the greatest Obstruction to Justice, and tend to the manifest perverting thereof; and, in other Cases, instead of true Charity and Bounty, would produce an unreasonable and ridiculous Profuseness and Prodigality. A few Instances will make this very plain.

What

What Criminal is there, who being brought to his Trial, does not wish he may come off by an Acquittal? Would not every Man upon the Jury, nay would not even the Judge himself, if he was in the Criminal's Case, wish that it might be his Fortune, by the Oversight or Favour of the Court, to escape being found guilty? If therefore a Man's fond Wishes to himself, are to be the Rule of his Dealings with others, the Jury, how well soever the Indictment against any Criminal be proved, are not to find him guilty, and the Judge is not to condemn him; or if the Matter should be carried so far, yet then the Jay-lor or the Executioner should willingly suffer an Escape; for *that* they themselves would most certainly desire, if ever it should be their own Fortune to be condemned. The Rule therefore, thus understood, would in Effect be subversive of all Government, and obstructive to all Justice among Men.

Nor would it be less destructive to Property. For what poor Man is there who would not be glad that his rich Neighbour would divide his Estate between them; and more glad still if he would give all to him? The rich Man therefore (if this would have been his own extravagant Wish, had it been his Lot to be poor) is bound to comply with the like Desire of his poor Neighbour, at least so far as to put him into as good a Condition as himself.

And the Absurdities in Practice which the Rule so understood would drive us to, with Regard to the Relations wherein we stand to one another, are not less than those already mentioned.

For what Father is there, who, when he was a Child, did not wish to have his own Will in every Thing, and to be free from Correction? Or what Servant who would not desire a Place with good Wages, and little or no Work? If therefore a Man is to do to others, what he, in such a Relation, would wish might be done to himself; the Father is bound to leave his Son to his own Liberty, and never to check or correct him for any Fault; and the Master to permit his Servants to do as much or as little of his Work as they please.

And many more such Cases might be put, whereby it would clearly appear that this Rule (given, without Doubt, to preserve Peace, Justice, and good Order in the World) being so misunderstood, would effectually obstruct all Justice, subvert all Laws, destroy all good Discipline, and put all Things into Confusion and Disorder.

2. It remains then, secondly, that we understand the Word, *would*, here, in the other more limited and restrained Sense before-mentioned, (taking the *Will* here spoken of, *not* for the *Will* of the *Affections*; but for the *Will* of the *Judgment*, or *Approbation*;) as if it had been said, whatsoever when done, or to be done, by others to you, you *approve of in your Judgment*, and think was, or will be, done *well, rightly, as it ought to be*; that do ye also to others.

And the Rule thus understood, is indeed an excellent and most comprehensive Direction of our whole Behaviour towards others; and whatever Case we apply it to, whether it be a Case of Justice, or of Equity, or of Charity, or of any Relation wherein we stand to one another; no such Absurdities or Inconveniences will follow from it, as were those before-mentioned.

The Judge will not then think himself bound to acquit a Criminal, altho' if he himself were such, he would, be sure, desire to be acquitted; because he will be sensible that such Desire would be unreasonable, and not fit to be granted; much less to be claimed as a Due or Right. For what Reason can be given that a Judge, in Favour to a Criminal, should pervert the Laws, obstruct the Course of Justice, be false to the Trust reposed in him, and become perjured by the Breach of his Judge's Oath?

Then also a rich Man needs not think himself obliged to give away his Estate, or the greatest Part thereof to others, making them rich by making himself poor; for he will readily see, that however the poor may desire this, they can't reasonably desire it. But what they may reasonably desire, as being really their Due, by the Appointment of God, the great Proprietor of all Things, is, that having nothing of their own, and being not able to supply themselves with the Necessaries of Life, the same may be supply'd to them out of the Superfluities of the rich: this he himself, if he was a poor Man, would think others bound in Duty to do for him; and therefore this same, he, being rich, or having more than he has need to use upon himself, will think himself bound to do for them that are in Want.

Then likewise a Father, altho' he well remembers that while he was a Son, he liked best to be under no Restraints, yet will not think himself bound to allow his Son a lawless Liberty; because his Reason will tell him, that if his Father had done so by him, however it might then have been most pleasing to him, it would not have been so much for his true Good, as it was to be kept under wise Discipline.

And then, lastly, a Master, although, if he himself was a Servant, he would, no doubt, be glad enough to be kept to do nothing; yet will not think himself obliged to keep Servants upon those Terms; because such Desire, in a Servant, is manifestly unreasonable and extravagant.

But if at last this so much celebrated Rule; *whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them*, means nothing more but only that we should do to others, as we our selves, if we were in their Case, might justly and reasonably desire that others, who were in such Case as we are now in, should do to us; where, you will say perhaps, is the great Excellency and Usefulness of this Rule above others? Or what is there more in it, than as if it had been plainly said, *See that ye do to all Men, in all Cases, whatsoever is just and reasonable?*

I answer; there is indeed nothing more in it. *That* is indeed the true Meaning of the Rule, and it prescribes nothing else, but only that we should be fair, just, and equal in all our Dealings. So that if we only regard the subject Matter of this Law, and what is the general End and Design of it, it must be granted that there is nothing new, nothing extraordinary, nothing more excellent in this, than there is in any other general Precept commanding the constant Exercise of Justice and Charity.

But then, whereas, if the Rule had been so expressed, *See that ye do to all Men, in all Cases, what is just and reasonable*; we might still, in many Cases, have been at a Loss to know, what was just and reasonable: The Rule, as it is here expressed, *whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them*, serves to enlighten our Understanding, as well as to command our Will; and instructs us, in all particular Cases to which we apply it, *what is just, equal and reasonable*; or *how* we ought to behave our selves in all Cases, so as not to transgress any of the particular Rules of Justice or Equity.

For Men are generally very dim and dark sighted in seeing the rightful Claims of other Men against them; and, on the contrary, as clear and quick sighted in discerning their own rightful Claims against others. Ask any Man how another ought to deal by him, and he will readily tell you, this or that he ought to do; or this or that he ought not to do. This is therefore what this Rule does, if it be rightly used and applied; it makes us as clear sighted in another Man's Case as we are in our own, by directing us for a while to change Places with him, and to put or suppose our selves in his Circumstances, and him in ours. For while we do this (while we are supposing him in such Circumstances as we our selves are really in,

in, and our selves in such as he is in) our Self-love will readily suggest to us and inform us, what he ought to do for us; how he ought to demean himself towards us: and when we think we have clearly discerned what his Duty is, or would be, in those Circumstances; we have then nothing more to do, but to take our own Place again, and to do to him (who really is in those Circumstances wherein we had just before supposed our selves) those very Things which we, while we had supposed our selves in those Circumstances, had judged were fit and reasonable to be done to us.

It is almost incredible what a great Light this imaginary Change of Places and Circumstances with another for a short while will diffuse into our Understandings; what Abundance of Duties it will suddenly suggest and bring into our Minds, which otherwise we should never have thought of; and also what a mighty Alteration it will make in our Judgments; and how very just and reasonable it will make many of those Offices to our Neighbour appear to be, which before that we did not so much as think it our Duty to perform to him at all.

This, I say, is the admirable Fulness, and the peculiar Excellency of this Rule, above any other general Rule of Duty which we meet with even in the holy Scripture it self; that it not only commands the Discharge of all the Duties of Justice and Charity to our Neighbour, but likewise shews us what those Duties are. By bidding us to change Places for a while with our Neighbour, in our Fancy and Imagination only, it enables any Man who will be at any Pains to consider Things, to teach himself his own Duty, and to discern readily (without the Help of a Guide, or the Instruction of Books; which he may not have Leisure or Opportunity to consult) how he ought to behave himself to all others, in what Circumstances soever they are, or what Relation soever they bear to him. For let him but only suppose himself in the Circumstances of those other Persons whom he has to deal with, and then consider what Things he should expect, and think he had *Reason* to expect from them, if they were in the Condition which he is in; and those very Things it is now his Duty to yield or to perform to them. And this leads me to the second Thing propounded; which was,

II. To shew the manifold Usefulness of having this Rule always in our Mind, and ready at Hand for our Direction.

For to learn our whole Duty from particular Precepts, expressing every Case that can happen, and all the Relations (with every Circumstance thereof) which we can be in, is impossible; because such particular Rules are not to be found, neither in the holy Scripture, nor in all the practical or casuistical Books which have been written; or if they were, yet it would be an endless Work, and a very great Consumption of Time, to be obliged to have Recourse to Books for our special Direction in every Point of Behaviour or Dealing with others. But in every such Point, it is an easy Matter for a Man to imagine himself in the Condition and Circumstances of the Person he has to deal with, and then to ask himself what Things he should then expect as due from others, or what Usage from others he should then complain of as injurious; his own Answer to which Questions will be then his Rule of Behaviour towards them.

For (which is a farther Commendation of this Rule) it is of universal Extent; it binds both to negative and affirmative Duties; it teaches both *what we are to do*, and *what we are not to do*; to do what we should think reasonable to be done to us; and not to do what we should complain of as a Wrong if it were done to us.

There is also no Case of Conscience of any kind, respecting the Duties of Men towards each other, which may not readily be resolved by a due Application of this Rule thereto. Particularly it is applicable to, and readily teaches us our Duty in all Cases of Justice, in all Cases of Mercy and Charity, and in every Relation which we are, or can be in towards other Men.

1. I say, it reaches all Cases of Justice between Man and Man; and not only commands, but likewise instructs us in all such Cases, what is just and equal. So that if Men would but sincerely examine, and order all their Actions, by this Rule, there would be no Deceit or Injustice among Men; nor would they ever want any other Rule to regulate their Actions by.

Did Men but make Conscience of living by this Rule, the Seller would not take Advantage of the Ignorance of the Buyer, in putting upon him nought or damaged Goods, or demanding of him an immoderate Price; because his own Conscience would tell him, that if he were a Buyer, and another should take such Advantage of his Ignorance, he should, with Reason, complain and cry out, that he was cheated: Nor, on the other side, would the Buyer make an Advantage of the Necessity of the Seller, and because he observed him in Difficulties for present Money, (either to buy Necessaries, or to satisfy the Importunity of his Creditors,) refuse to give him that Price for his Goods, which yet he himself should otherwise have thought them richly worth, and very well bought at; for he will consider, that if the Seller's Case had been his own, he should not have thought his own Necessity a good Reason why another should refuse to give him the Market Price for his Goods; but rather why he should be willing to give him the best Price for them.

Were this Rule duly observed, the Borrower would reckon himself strictly bound to be as careful of the Goods lent him as if they were his own, and to restore them in due Time; because he will know that when he lends, he expects the Borrower should be careful; and complains that he is unworthily dealt with, if either his Goods be not restored, or not in Time, or not in such good Condition as with careful Usage they would have been in; and the Lender, on the other side, would not exact unreasonably for the Loan of his Goods, or Money; because he knows that if he himself were forced to borrow, he should account and call that Man an unjust Extortioner who should do so by him.

Were this Rule well remembred and observed, there would be no need of ever binding Men in Obligations, or suing them at the Law, to perform their Bargains, or execute their Trusts; because whoever strikes a Bargain, or accepts a Trust, cannot but know what he should account another Man, who, having made a fair Bargain with him, should then refuse to stand to it; or, who, having accepted a Trust for his Use, should neglect to perform it. And therefore should he himself do the same, he must be convicted and condemned by his own Conscience.

In fine, (for to run through all Particulars would be endless,) who is there that does not call that Man a Knave, or an unjust Person, who robs him, who cheats him, who keeps from him his own, or who any ways abuses him in Word or Deed? Every Man has a quick Sense of the Wrongs done to himself; and is ready to make Complaints to all he meets with of the Injuries and Abuses which have been put upon him. If therefore he would but make another Man's Case his own, he would have the same quick and lively Sense of the Injuries which are done to another; and so would not be more strongly influenced, by his own Self-love, to proper Injuries from himself, than he would by the plain Dictates of his Conscience, be restrained from doing any Sort of Wrong or Injustice to his Neighbour.

2. This Rule, *whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*, reaches likewise all Cases of Mercy and Charity; and a Man who is govern'd by it in all his Actions, can no more be failing in the Offices of Kindness, than in the Offices of Justice. And that it was designed by our Saviour for a Rule and Direction of Charity, as well as of Justice, is evident from his prescribing this very Rule, in *Luke vi. 31*. immediately subsequent to, and as farther enforcing, two Precepts of Charity, which he had given in the Verses just before.

And it is indeed a most excellent Direction of Charity, such as being duly attended to would make all others needless; and effectually secure the Exercise of Charity in every Case which could happen.

Let but a Man imagine himself in the Condition of that poor Person who craves Relief of him; and then let himself to consider what Relief he should, as he thinks, in reason expect from those who were able to give it; and at the same Time he will see what Relief he ought in Reason to afford to the Person who now craves it of him. For Reason obliges all Men alike; and, being in the same Circumstances, it obliges them to the same Things: So that what I should judge another Man oblig'd to, who was in such Circumstances as I am, that same Thing I must judge myself, being indeed in those very Circumstances, oblig'd to do. Let but a Man therefore, I say, reflect, what Judgment he himself, if he was a poor Man, should pass upon another who was in good Circumstances, who seeing him almost ready to perish with Hunger, or Thirst, or Cold, should deny him a Morsel of Bread, or a Cup of Drink, or a cast-off Garment. Let him but consider how cruel and hard-hearted he should think that Person, who should refuse to preserve his Life, when he might do it without any sensible Loss, or Diminution of his own Estate; and then he must judge himself to be the like cruel and hard-hearted Man, if he denies such a cheap and easy Succour to another, when he is well able to give it, and the other does greatly want it. Thus, I say, his imaginary Supposal of himself in the Condition of the poor Man who begs his Charity, will at the same Time both direct him in the Nature and Measure of his Bounty; and also convince him of the Obligation he is under, to extend it to his indigent or distressed Neighbour. And the like Influence and Effect it will have in all other Cases of Mercy and Compassion; it will both teach us how, and also make us ready and willing, to comfort the sorrowful and afflicted, to assist and defend the weak, to deliver the oppressed, to right the injured, and the like. Because supposing our selves in such Circumstances, we must quickly be sensible, both how we our selves should desire to be succoured and relieved; and also how hard we should think it, to be denied such Succour and Relief as we stood in Need of.

But above all, the Consideration of what we should and do desire for our selves, will readily dispose us to forgive the Injuries which are done us, and the Trespases which are committed against us by others. For to induce us to this, we need not, as in the former Cases, argue upon an imaginary Supposition, or putting of our selves into the Condition of the Person who has trespassed against us; seeing his Condition is really and truly our own; if not with regard to Men, at least with regard to God, against whom our Sins and Offences have been innumerable; and yet we hope in his Mercy that he will pardon them all to us upon our Repentance. How then can we deny this same Favour to another, to a Man like ourselves, and whose Trespases against us are, in Comparison, but few in Number; and those too very small and inconsiderable? How, I say, can we refuse to forgive our Brother, who confesses his Fault and earnestly begs our Pardon, those Offences which he has committed against us; and yet be so unreasonable, as

to expect, that God should forgive us our infinitely more and greater Offences committed against him? What can be more reasonable in this Case, than that *as we would it should be done unto us, we should so do unto others*? That we should as readily forgive those who have offended us, as we our selves do hope and expect Forgiveness of our own Offences at God's Hands?

And if we refuse to yield to this equal Condition, how justly may we expect that Sentence which was passed upon the wicked Servant in the Gospel, *Matth. xviii. 34.* who, when he had been frankly forgiven by his Lord a great Debt of *ten thousand Talents*, went immediately, and *took by the Throat and cast into Prison his Fellow Servant*, who owed him but an *hundred Pence*, i. e. not above the six hundred thousandth Part of the great Debt which had been just before forgiven him; and who did not refuse the Payment of that neither, but only desired Time for it. Of which base Dealing with his Fellow Servant, when his Lord was made acquainted, it is said, *that he was wroth*, and immediately revoking his former Act of Grace, *delivered him over to the Tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.* And so likewise, says our Saviour, at the thirty fifth Verse of that Chapter, *shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespases.*

3. Lastly, As this Rule reaches all Cases of Justice and Charity, so does it likewise all *Relations* wherein Men stand to one another. And it is indeed alone sufficient to teach us all the Duties of all those several Relations wherein we are, or can be, to others.

Thus, if the Father would know his Duty, and how he ought to behave himself towards his Son, he shall not need to read many Books to be informed: He shall only need to call to mind, what Kindnesses or Expressions of Love, he himself, when he was a Son, expected from his own Father; and what Actions of his Father towards him, he not only then thought, but still thinks, were too rigorous and severe, and not consistent with that natural Affection which a good Father should bear to his Son: And let him but now practise those, and avoid these, and he will be such a Father to his Son as he should be.

In like manner, if the Son would know his Duty to his Father, he shall need but only to consider, what Duty and Respect he himself, when he shall come to be a Father, shall expect from his own Children: And let him but now be as good a Son to his Father in every respect, as dutiful, as submissive, as tender of his Father's Welfare, and as ready and willing to succour him, as he hopes his own Children will hereafter be to him; and then he will be such a Son as he ought to be.

The Master likewise would easily discern what is his Duty towards his Servants, if he would but for a while suppose himself to be a Servant, and then sit down and consider, what Usage he himself, if he were in that Condition, should think he might reasonably expect from his Master; and what Usage from him he should complain of, as hard, unjust or tyrannical.

And the Servant, in like manner, would need no other Rule but this, to direct him how he ought to behave himself to his Master: For let him but only be as diligent, as industrious, and as faithful in his Master's Service, now while he is a Servant, as he can hope, or expect, or in Reason desire, that his own Servants should be in his, when he comes to be a Master, and then he will be indeed a very good Servant.

And the like might easily be shewn in all the other Relations wherein Men stand to one another. They have nothing more to do, in order to know the Duty of that Relation which they are in, but only to put themselves for a while, by a Supposal, in the Place of the Persons whom they are related to;

and then to consider, what Duties, or Services, they should then expect from others; by which they will readily see, what Duties or Services they are, which they now owe to them. And if they do but govern themselves always by this Rule, doing to others as they themselves would reasonably desire to be done unto, if they were in the other's Case; they will effectually be led to, and secured in the Practice of whatsoever is just and reasonable, in their whole Behaviour towards all those who are any ways related to them.

And now having explained the Meaning of this general Rule of Behaviour towards others; *whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*; and having also shewn the manifold Usefulness thereof; and the Advantage of having it always in our Mind; nothing more remains to be done, but only, in the third and last Place,

III. To endeavour, in a few Words, to persuade you all, in all your Business and Negotiations with one another, always to live and act according to this Rule; to do as you would be done unto. To persuade you to which, I shall offer to your Consideration these three Things: 1. The great Reasonableness and Equality of this Law. 2. That the Observation of it, in all our Dealings is the only Means of obtaining and preserving Peace in our own Minds. And, 3. That upon our Observation of it depends likewise our Hope of Happiness in the other World.

1. The great Reasonableness and Equality of this Law, would alone be sufficient to oblige us to the Observance of it; altho' we had nothing else to engage us thereto.

It is indeed a Law, which carries its own Light and Reason along with it; and which no Man can possibly make any Exception to, or Objection against. For all Men, as Men, are upon equal Terms, and have the same Right to be dealt fairly and honestly with; and that is the only Design of this Law, the same with that of other Laws, *viz.* to oblige us to deal fairly and honestly with all those whom we have any Dealings with: What is peculiar in it is, that it constitutes us our selves Judges of what is fair and honest; but then, that we might be fair and impartial Judges, it divests us for a while of *Self*. And nothing can be more reasonable than that is; for it is agreed by all, that no Man ought to be a Judge in his own Cause; it is generally presumed that in such Case his Self-Love would so blind his Eyes, that he would not be able to judge impartially: But now, having laid aside *Self*, and having put our selves for a while into the Condition and Circumstances of the Person we have Dealings with; *he*, for that while, becomes our *Self*; we consequently, for that while, are as much inclined on *his* Side, as we were before on our own; and being equally byassed on both Sides, it is as if we had been byassed on neither Side; *we*, as it were a *third Person*, judge, as it were between *two Selves*, which is all one as if we judged between two Strangers; it may therefore well be supposed, that we judge as impartially as another third Person would do.

In a Word, this Rule both commands us to give our Neighbour his Due; and it also puts us into a Method of readily discerning, and rightly judging, what is his Due. Now inasmuch as it commands us to give him what is really his Due, it is manifestly a just and reasonable Law; for it is fit that every Man should have his Due. And it is no less evidently a just and reasonable Law, as to the Method which it takes to instruct and teach us what is our Neighbour's Due; for the Method which it takes is, by ordering us to consider the Circumstances and Relations of Men, abstractedly from their Persons; which is plainly right; for to the mere Person of a Man there is nothing due, or if there be, the same must be equally due to all that are alike human Persons: So that if there be any Thing due to one Man, which is not due

to another, it must be upon the Account of his proper Circumstances, or special Relations to others. And if the Duty, which is owing to any Man, results only from his Circumstances or Relations, the same Duty must needs be equally owing to all which are in the same Circumstances, or the same Relations. If therefore (for Example) I, supposing my self a Magistrate, and considering my self as such, do judge such and such Duties to be, upon that Account, owing to me from my Subjects, I must at the same Time judge that the very same Duties are owing to all Magistrates; and then, in Case I my self am really a Subject, I must conclude, that I owe, and am obliged to discharge, the same Offices which I before thought were due to all Magistrates, to those Magistrates in particular whom Providence has plac'd in Authority over me. Or again, if considering my self as a Father, I judge, that to me, because a Father, such and such Duties are owing from my Children; I must likewise judge, that the same Duties are owing from all Children to their Fathers; and therefore, seeing I was a Father only in Supposition, but am really and truly a Son, I must needs judge that I owe the same Duties to my own Father, which I had just before judged were due to all Fathers: And the like in other Cases. And therefore, when upon considering my self as in the Circumstances or Relation of the Person I am dealing with, I have determined in my own Judgment, that to a Person in such Circumstances or Relations such and such Offices are due; if afterwards I my self neglect to perform those Offices to them who are in such Circumstances, or so related to me, I can't but judge that I act unreasonably, and must needs be condemned by my own Conscience. Which leads me to the next Argument, whereby I propos'd to persuade to the strictest Observation of this Rule, of doing as you would be done unto; *viz.*

2. That the Observation of this Rule in all our Dealings with others is the only Means of obtaining and preserving Peace in our own Minds. For if what I have done to my Neighbour be what if he being in my Place, and I in his he had done to me, I should have complain'd of as hard and unjust; I cannot but at the same Time pass the same Judgment on my own Dealing with him: He, in the Circumstances he is in, having plainly a rightful Claim to the same Usage which I should have had a Right to, had I been in those Circumstances. So that though it be an easy matter, when we have done a hard or unjust Thing to another, to make such an handsome Apology in the Excuse of it; and so to represent our Case to the World, as to avoid the Censure and Condemnation of other People; yet we shall never be able to avoid condemning our selves, unless our Actions be such as may be justified by this Rule; and it is better a Man should be condemned by all the World besides, than by his own Conscience only. For if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 21. and having Peace with our selves and with God, we may defy and slight all the Censures and Reproaches of Men: But if our own Heart reproaches us, if our own Conscience condemns us, we can have no Hope in either God or our selves; and the good Word of others can be but a sorry Comfort to us, when at the same Time we must know that we do not deserve it. And all the Pleasures and Enjoyments of Sense, if they be the Fruits of ill gotten Wealth, can never yield us any true or solid Content, so long as we are not satisfied from our selves; and that it is impossible we should be, when the Means whereby we have acquired what we have, have been such as, even we our selves being Judges, we must and should have condemned in any other Person. Lastly; as the Comfort of this present Life depends upon our living by this Rule, so does likewise our Hope of that which is to come. For if our Heart condemn us, God greater than our Heart, and knoweth all Things,

Things, 1 John iii. 20. So that however we may escape the Judgment of Men, for any foul or unjust Dealing, by falsely representing our Case to them, we cannot possibly escape the Judgment of God. And the Judgment of God (that Judgment which he has already told us he will pass upon us) is this; that if we do not deal with others, as we should in Justice expect, or in Reason desire, they should deal with us, God himself will so deal with us, as we deal with them. Thus the holy *Psalmist* declares God's Proceedings with Men; *Psal. xviii. 24, 25, 26. The Lord hath recompensed me according to my Righteousness; according to the Cleanness of my Hands in his Eye-sight. With the Merciful thou wilt shew thy self merciful; with an upright Man thou wilt shew thy self upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thy self pure; and then it follows, with the froward thou wilt shew thy self froward.* Which last Clause, nevertheless, we are not so to understand, as if God would deal unjustly with those, who deal unjustly with others: No, far be from us such a Thought as this concerning God: *Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do Right? Gen. xviii. 25.* God will not therefore, I say, be unjust to those who have been unjust to others; but (which in Effect is all one) he will be just to them; that is, he will shew them no Favour; he will deal strictly with them according to their Deservings; he will make them no Allowances nor Abatements; and then they are as sure to be condemned to the eternal Torments of Hell, as if they were there already. And thus God has plainly declared he will deal with them; *Matth. vi. 15. If ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases.* James ii. 13. *He shall have Judgment without Mercy that hath shewed no Mercy.* And more generally, and in such Words as will reach all Cases, whether of Injustice, or Uncharitableness, *Matth. vii. 2. With what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

I shall conclude all with briefly observing, as a plain Corollary or Inference from what hath been said, the very great Reasonableness and Easiness of all those Laws, whether of Justice, or of Mercy, which God has commanded us to observe in our Dealings with others. For the Sum of them all (as I have already noted, and as our *Saviour* himself also affirms in the Text) is this, that we should do, as we would be done unto. *Whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: For this,* says our *Saviour, is the Law and the Prophets.* That is, this is all which is any where commanded by God; all the Commandments of the second Table are reducible to this one Rule; all the Duties which you owe to your Neighbour are comprehended in this single Precept; *as ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them,*

Now we all allow it to be a very mild, easy, and gentle Government, where the Subjects are permitted to make Laws for themselves; or where nothing is imposed upon them by Law, but what they themselves consent to as reasonable. This we reckon the peculiar Happiness of our *British* Constitution; that we are subject to no Laws but such as being made in Parliament are therein consented to by those whom we chuse to represent us there; *i. e.* by our selves: And by this we distinguish between a limited and an absolute, between an easy and a tyrannical Government. That is a limited, a moderate, and an easy Government, where the Subjects themselves are, in Part, Legislators; and that is an absolute, arbitrary, and tyrannical Government, where the Prince's sole Will is the Law; and the People are all bound to do according to their King's Pleasure, tho' it be not agreeable to their own Judgment.

Hence therefore you see plainly the Easiness of the divine Government, and the Equiry of those Laws, which God has given us to direct our Car-

riage and Behaviour towards one another. For God might, if he had pleased, by his own single Authority and absolute Power have given us Rules of Behaviour; and if he had done so, we had been bound to observe them. But to shew the Gentleness and easiness of his Government he has not done this; he has given us no Laws but what we our selves approve of; or rather, he has left it to us to frame and draw out Laws for our selves, and is pleased to ratify those Laws which we our selves make.

For this is plainly the Case, as to the Matter I have been discoursing of. Indeed the very Relations which Men bear to, and the Dealings which they have with each other, do necessarily import some Duties owing from one to the other; for there can be no Relation without a Duty belonging to it, nor any Dealing with another which is not directed by some Law; but then what my Duty is to my Neighbour, with regard to the Relation which I bear to him, or the Dealing which I have with him, is by this Rule of our Saviour, left to me my self to determine: Only I must put, or suppose my self in his Condition, and him in mine; and then I must ask my self, how I think he ought to behave himself towards me; and the Answer which my own Reason teaches me to make this Question, is the Law by which I am to govern my self in my dealing with him.

Now can any Thing be fairer? can any Thing be more equal, more mild, more gentle, than this is; that it should be left to me to prescribe Rules to my self, and to set out my own Duty?

Certainly then, if we will not submit to this gentle Government; if we will not be subject to these Laws, which our own Reason prescribes to us, we deserve no Pity or Favour from God, nor can we in Reason expect any. And if we are but subject only to these Laws of our own making, and strictly observe them in our Practice, we shall not be wanting in any Duty towards our Neighbour. For this is all which is required of us by God, to do as we would be done unto, and not to do that to another, which we would not have done unto us. *Whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be given, as is most due, all Honour, Glory and Praise, now and for ever. Amen.



DISCOURSE LXXIX.

The Difficulties in a godly Life.

MATTH. VII. 13, 14.

Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.



OUR Saviour begins now to draw towards a Conclusion of his famous *Sermon upon the Mount*. Having therefore, in the foregoing Part of it, bound his Disciples to stricter Duty in several Instances than Men had been obliged to before, either by the *Law of Nature*, or the *Law of Moses*, it was very proper for him, before he concluded it, to say somewhat to encourage them to undertake the Duty he had before laid upon them, and to remove that Backwardness and Unwillingness which they might have to it.

And tho' there are indeed several other Impediments of a godly and *Christian* Life, yet there are two especially which seem to be of the greatest Force; one is the Consideration of the great *Difficulty* of a good Life in it self, that the *Christian Institution* binds upon us several heavy Burdens and grievous to be born; the other is, the *Singularity* of it, that if a Man should lead his Life in such exact Strictness as the Gospel enjoins, he would be like No-body, and for want of Company would hardly be able to keep himself in Countenance.

These two great Impediments therefore of a strict and holy Life our Saviour here removes; and he does it, not by denying that the Case is indeed, in great measure, such as it is supposed or objected to be; that is, he does not deny that the Way of strict Virtue and Godliness is indeed both strait and difficult, and likewise solitary and lonesome; he rather grants that it is so: But then he shews that neither of these Reasons ought to discourage us from going into it; because that other Way, which seems to Men to be the most pleasant, and which has the most Company it, leads at last to Death and *Destruction*. Whereas this Way, which is indeed, as well as it is thought to be, more strait and rugged, and which for that Reason, very few, in Comparison, can be persuaded to enter into, and keep steady in, leads at last to *Life* and Happiness;

Happiness; and that there is no other Way which leads thither but this. *Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

There needs to be very little said for the Explication of the Words of the Text; because, tho' the Expressions of it are all metaphorical, yet the Metaphor is so very often used in Scripture, and is so easy to be understood, that the Sense of the Text can no more be doubted or mistaken than if it had been expressed in the plainest Words.

For by the two *Ways* and *Gates* here spoken of, it is very obvious to understand two different sorts of Life and Conversation, a good Life, and a wicked Life; one of which, *viz.* a good Life, will be rewarded with eternal Happiness in Heaven; and the other of which, *viz.* a wicked Life, will be punished with the eternal Torments of Hell: The former therefore here called, *the Gate and Way leading to Life*, the latter, *the Gate and Way leading to Destruction*.

And if it be supposed that our *Saviour* meant somewhat different by the *Gate*, from what he meant by the *Way*, it might probably be this: By the *Gate*, he might mean the *first Beginning* of, or *Entrance* upon, any Course of Life, good or bad; and by the *Way*, he might mean the *Continuance* in the same Course or Method of Living.

And when he says, that the *Gate is strait*, and the *Way narrow* which lead to Life, and that there are *few that find* them, the Meaning of these Expressions, taken out of the Metaphor, is plainly this; that there are such *Difficulties* and *Impediments* in a Course of strict Virtue and Godliness, that very *few* can be persuaded to begin it, and that several after they have begun, have not Heart or Courage enough to continue in it. And when he says, on the other Side, that the *Gate is wide*, and the *Way broad* that lead to *Destruction*, and that *there are many that go in thereat*; the Meaning is, that there are so many *Temptations* to Sin, and that the Practice of it promises so much *Pleasure* and *Delight* to Men, that the *greatest Part* of the World are thereby deluded, so that they freely allow themselves in a wicked Course, without considering what will be the Fruit of it at the last: Their Minds are so taken up with the Thoughts of the present Pleasure of Sin, that they never think seriously of the miserable End it will bring them to.

From the Words thus explained, I shall take Occasion to do these two Things.

I. I shall consider, what Ground there is for the Objection which is here intimated to lie against the Practice of those Duties which the *Christian* Institution lays upon us; or how far it is true, and must be granted, that the *Way* of Virtue and Godliness is *strait* and *lonesome*; *strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way, and few there be that find it*: And on the other Side, how far it is true, and must likewise be granted, that the *Way* of Vice and Wickedness is *wide* and pleasant, and very full of *Company*; *wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way, and many there be which go in thereat*. And,

II. I shall shew, that considering the different Ends to which these two Ways do lead at the last, the *strait Way* to *Life*, and the *broad Way* to *Destruction*; neither is the *Straitness* and *Lonesomeness* of that a reasonable Discouragement to us from going in it; neither is the *Broadness* of this, and the *good Store of Company* which we shall meet with in it, a reasonable Inducement to us to go in this: 'But that still it is our Interest, as well as our Duty, and what, if we are wise, we shall chuse to do, to enter in at that *Gate*, and to go in that *Way* which leads to *Life*, tho' they be *strait*, and

† narrow,

narrow, and lonesome; and to avoid the Gate and Way which lead to Destruction, though they be wide and broad, and much more frequented than the other are. Enter ye in at the strait Gate, &c.

I. I shall consider, what Ground there is for that Objection which is intimated in the Text to lie against the Practice of those Duties which the Christian Institution lays upon us; or, how far it is true and must be granted, that the Way of Virtue and Godliness is streight and lonesome; *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way—and few there be that find it*; and on the other side, how far it is true, and must likewise be granted, that the Way of Vice and Wickedness is wide and pleasant, and very full of Company; *wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way—and many there be which go in thereat*.

For, first, whereas it is said here, that the Way of Virtue and Godliness is streight and narrow, St. John tells us, on the other side, 1 John v. 3. that God's Commandments are not grievous; and the Wise-man had said before, Prov. iii. 17. *Her Ways, that is, the Ways of Wisdom, of Virtue and Religion, are Ways of Pleasantness*; and our Saviour himself tells us, Matth. xi. 30. that his Yoke is easy, and his Burthen light.

And, secondly, whereas it is here farther said, that the Way of Vice and Wickedness is wide and pleasant, the Wise-man seems to say quite otherwise, Prov. xxii. 5. *Thorns and Snares are in the Way of the froward*; and Prov. xv. 19. *The Way of the slothful, that is, of the Man who will not be at the Pains to be good, is as an Hedge of Thorns, but the Way of the righteous is made plain*.

And, lastly, whereas it is said here, that there are many which go in at the wide Gate which leads to Destruction, and but few who find the narrow Way to Life; our Saviour says, on the other side, Matth. viii. 11. *that many shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob*: And in Revel. vii. 9. where the Number of the faithful Servants of God who had received his Mark in their Foreheads is spoken of it; is said that they were a great Multitude which no Man could number, of all Nations, and Kindreds, and People, and Tongues.

Now if these Texts of Scripture are not contradictory the one to the other, as it is certain they are not, the whole Scripture being given by Inspiration of the same Spirit of Truth; they must, that they may be reconcil'd, be interpreted and qualified, the one by the other.

So that consequently, first; when it is here said, that the Gate and Way leading to Life are strait and narrow, it is not to be understood that they are so very streight and narrow that there's no going through them at all; that is, that the Condition which God has required of us is impossible, that the Rules which our Christianity binds us to observe are impracticable. This indeed is what some seem to apprehend, and for which Reason they never set themselves to do what they can, presuming that all which they could be able to do would not be sufficient; a Mistake no less dangerous than it is false. For though there are indeed several Difficulties and Discouragements in the Way which leads to Life; yet they are no other than such as a great many in all Ages have undertaken and happily overcome: They are therefore no other than such as we also may master by the Help of a good Resolution, and a hearty Endeavour; not indeed by our own Strength and Power, but by Grace and Strength deriv'd from God, who is always ready to assist our sincere Endeavours.

Considering therefore that the Rules and Precepts of the Gospel, though they bind us indeed to several Duties which are cross to our carnal Appetites and Desires; yet do not bind us to any Thing but what is just, and fitting and reasonable; so that they are not the arbitrary Laws of an imperious Governor, but such Laws as we our selves must needs approve of, and allow were fitting to be enacted; it might truly be said by the *Apostle*, that the *Commandments of God are not grievous*.

Considering also the Assistance which is given us by the Grace of God, to bear that Burden which he lays upon us, and that Peace and Satisfaction of Mind, that *Joy in the Holy Ghost*, which does constantly attend a *Conscience void of Offence*; it might be no less truly said by the *Wise-man*, *her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness*; and by our *Saviour*, *my Yoke is easy and my Burthen is light*.

And so likewise, *secondly*; when it is here said, that the *Gate* and *Way* leading to *Destruction* are *wide* and *broad*, it was not hereby meant, that the Practice of Sin does always yield to Men that Pleasure and Satisfaction which it promises; it was not meant, that the Way of Sin is so very smooth and easy, that there are no Rubs nor Hindrances at all in it, and that no present Evil or Inconvenience does ever attend it: For, on the contrary, Sin is seldom so sweet in the Mouth as it is bitter in the Belly; it promises much Pleasure, but it affords little, and it is closely attended with Shame and Remorse, and very often is the Cause of Infamy, Poverty, Sickness, and an untimely Death. The Way of Sin therefore, though it may in some other Respects be said to be wide and broad, smooth and pleasant; for so it appears to be to those who are entering into it, and this tempts them to take it; yet is not so very free from Trouble and Perplexity, but that it might, with good Reason enough, be likened, by the *Wise-man*, to a *Hedge of Thorns*, which, when a Man is got into, he can neither continue nor lie down in with Ease, nor yet get out of it without being scratch'd and torn.

And so likewise, *thirdly*; when it is said here, that there are but few who find the *Way to Life*, and that there are *many* who go in at the *Gate*, and walk in the *Way* which leads to *Death* and *Destruction*; it is not meant, that the Number of good and virtuous Men who travel in the Way to Life, is in it self very small and inconsiderable, so that a Man who enters into this Way shall be in Danger of being quite alone: But only that their Number is small in comparison with the greater Number of those, who chuse the *broad Way to Destruction*. But they who are few comparatively with a greater Number, may yet be a great many, considered by themselves. And that such the Number of good Men is, who go on steadily in the Way of Piety and Virtue, and do obtain at last the End of their Faith, even the Salvation of their Souls, is what we are told in the Places before cited, where it is said, that *many shall come from all Quarters of the World, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God*; and that the faithful Servants of God are *a great multitude which no Man can number*.

It is plain therefore by what has been already said, that the Expressions used in the Text, concerning the *Straitness* of the *Gate*, and the *Narrowness* of the *Way* leading to *Life*, and the *Broadness* and *Wideness* of those leading to *Destruction*, and the *Fewness* of those who go in that, and the *Multitude* of those who go in this, are not to be understood *absolutely*, but only *respectively* and *comparatively*; so that consequently *that Straitness* or *Narrowness* which is here allowed to be in the *Way* of strict Virtue, may not be such as ought in Reason to discourage us from going in it; nor, on the other side, may the *Wideness* or *Pleasantness* of a sinful Course be such, as ought in Reason to incline us

to chuse that: Neither may there be such a *Difference in Number* between those who go in the *narrow Way* to *Life*, and those who go in the *broad Way* to *Destruction*, as that we need fear being alone if we go in the former, or can have good Reason to go in the latter only for Company's sake.

But nevertheless thus much is certainly true, that the *Way to Life* and Happiness is not so very plain and easy as some think it; at least as they seem to think it, who say they hope they shall get to Heaven, and yet will be at no Pains either to enquire out the Way, or to set themselves to go in it when it is shewn them. Neither is it so much frequented, as that we may safely conform our selves in all Things to the Fashion of the World, not doubting but that if we live as well as most of our Neighbours do, we shall live well enough. If it had been so, our *Saviour* would never have given it as a Rule that we should *enter in at the strait Gate*, at which there are *few* who enter, and that we should go in the *narrow Way*, which is found and travelled in but by a *few*; neither would he have made it a Matter of Caution to us, that we should avoid the Way which seems to be the *broadest* and *pleasanteest*, and which has the *most Company* in it.

But it may be convenient to speak to these three Points a little more particular, and to draw some practical Observations therefrom.

1. Then, *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life*. As to this Point it must be granted.

(1.) That the *first Beginning* or Entrance upon a virtuous Course of Life is commonly attended with great Difficulty; *strait is the Gate*.

I have already noted, that it is not unlikely, that our *Saviour* by the *strait Gate*, and the *narrow Way*, might mean not just the very same Thing, but the two great Parts of a godly Christian Life; *viz.* the *Entrance* upon it by the *Gate*, and the *Continuance* in it by the *Way*. Now you know that a *Gate* leading into any Passage or Entry, whether the Passage or Entry be wide or narrow, is commonly straighter and narrower than the Passage or Entry is which it leads to; and so it is here, the *Way to Life* is but *narrow*, as our *Saviour* here says, and I shall shew by and by; but the *Gate* opening into this Way is *straiter* than the Way it self is. The Beginning of a good Life has much the greatest Difficulty in it, afterwards it grows easier and pleasanter.

And yet neither is the Beginning alike difficult to all; for they who have had the Advantage of a good Education, and have been piously and virtuously brought up, were entred into the right Way, even before they well knew the Difference between Good and Evil; they got thro' the Gate in their Childhood, and so were not at all, or but very little, sensible of the Straightness of it; and now that they are grown up, they have nothing else to do but to keep strait on in the Way which their Parents or Teachers have set them into; and it is so very likely that they will do so, after that being come to the Use of Reason they shall discern what a wise Choice their Parents or Guardians have made for them, that the *Wise-man* delivers it as a proverbial Truth, to which there are none or very few Exceptions, *Prov. xxii. 6.* that if a *Child be trained up in the Way wherein he should go, when is old, or grown up, he will not depart from it*.

But to them who have not had this blessed Advantage, but have been suffered to follow the Bent of their own wicked Inclinations by Nature, the Gate or Entrance into the Way of Life is straighter; for they have not only wicked Inclinations to resist and subdue, but likewise vicious Customs to alter, before they can get into the Way that leads to Life; and Custom, we use to say, is a second Nature. By Custom we may have made some Sins familiar and natural, and so more hardly avoidable, to which

by Nature we had no great Proneness at first; and wicked Inclinations, whether natural, or acquired by Use, when they have been long gratified, gain every Day greater Strength and Power, and so become much harder to be crossed and subdued afterwards, than they would have been if we had set our selves to resist them sooner. And therefore the Difficulty of a Change of Life, from bad to good, is express'd by the Prophet *Jeremy* by a proverbial Phrase, which in strictness denotes an Impossibility, *Jer. xiii. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.*

But nevertheless it is certain that there is not an absolute Impossibility in it, because it has been done by a great many; *such were some of you*, says the *Apostle*, writing to the *Corinthians*, *1 Cor. vi. 11.* that is, as appears by the foregoing Words, they had been *Fornicators, Idolaters, Adulterers, Effeminate, Abusers of themselves with Mankind, Thieves, Covetous, Drunkards, Revilers, Extortioners*, and the like; *such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* Now what has been done is possible; what has been done may be done again. It being therefore not impossible for the worst of Men, for such as are most corrupted, through the Assistance of the Divine Grace, to reform a vitious Habit, how inveterate or deep-rooted soever it be; the Difficulty of it, how difficult soever it is supposed to be, should not discourage us from attempting it, but rather it should engage us to set about it with Vigour and Resolution, and good Hope of Success; especially considering that the Difficulty is in great Measure, if not chiefly, of our own making. And to this we may be much encouraged by considering, what I have now said, *viz.* that the chief Difficulty is at first, in *getting through the Gate* which opens into the Way that leads to Life; and that after we shall have passed the Gate, the Passage widens, and the Way we shall be afterwards to walk in will not be quite so streight as the Gate it self was.

And yet we must not flatter our selves with an Opinion that after this first Difficulty is master'd, we shall have done all our Work, or at least shall have no other Work to do afterwards, but what we may in a Manner play with. For,

(2.) As the *Gate is strait*, so the *Way* also is *narrow*; *strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way*; though the *Way* be wider than the *Gate* was that opened into it, yet it may still be truly said to be *narrow*; there will be Difficulty in the going in it, as well as there was in the first entring into it.

For if we have Regard only to our own *corrupt Inclinations by Nature*, though these may be weakened, and are indeed every Day more and more weakened, by Resistance and Denial, yet they still continue in us; they continue as the little Strings of the Roots of Weeds do in the Ground after it has been well weeded, which, if constant Care be not taken to pull them up also, as soon as ever they begin to shoot forth, will quickly grow as big as the old Roots were, which were torn from them.

Or if we have Regard to the *evil Customs* which we have contracted, these are not to be broken off at once; but a Habit of any Thing will for a long while leave a Proneness to fall into it again; and what was learn'd in the Youth may in the after Age take up more Time to unlearn and to forget, than it did at first to learn it.

And besides these Difficulties in the Way to Life, which are caused by our own wicked Inclinations and Customs from within, we must expect also in the whole Course of a virtuous and godly Life, to meet with *great Discouragements from without*; a strict Course of Virtue and Piety will often oblige us to forego considerable Gain which might have been made by strain-

ing a Point of Duty; and it may and does many Times expose Men to the suffering of great Losses, and the enduring violent Persecutions; and if we ever hope to find it as easy, and as free from all manner of temporal Trouble and Inconvenience as we perhaps could wish it, we shall certainly be disappointed. For *thro' many Tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God; and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer Persecution.* Whatever Times they live in, Persecution of some sort or other they must look for, and will certainly meet with.

(3.) The Way to Life is *narrow*; there is and always must be some Difficulty in going in it, because it is a *strait* and *small Path*, out of which it is very easy, if we do not constantly look well to our Goings, to step aside. For the Rule is a right Line, the least Deviation from it is Crookedness. Virtue is in the Mean, which is sometimes not very obvious to be discern'd; we may easily err, either on the right Hand, or on the left, by Excess, or by Defect; and oftentimes while we are careful to avoid leaning too much to one side, that very Care makes us incline too much on the other side; and on which side soever we go out of the Way, it is still a going out of the Way; for the Way to Life is but one.

(4.) There is Difficulty in the Way to Heaven, because whensoever we do step besides this narrow Path, that is, whensoever we fall into any Sin, which after our greatest Care we shall be always subject to do, this is a great Stop and Hindrance to us; for the Way to Life is of that Kind, that when-ever we decline from it, there is no way of getting into it again, but just in that Place where we left it and went out of it; there is no cross Way, by which we may pass from the Way of Sin to the Path of Virtue, in case we have not gone very wide from it. But how little soever the wrong Way which we have taken decline from the right, we must go back again as much as we have gone; before we can get into that Way which we have forsaken. For nothing less is true Repentance for any Sin, than the undoing, so far as is possible, our own sinful Act, and setting right what we have put out of order; and while we were going, and while we were gone out of the Way, and while we are returning back to it again, much Time will be spent, and yet nothing done, no Progress made; we shall be no nearer our Journey's End than when we began to go astray: That is, in plain Words, while the Guilt was contracting, and while it is washing off again by Sorrow, and Restitution, and Satisfaction, so much of our Life will slip by us, that we may not have enough left to finish our Course in, unless we afterwards make more Speed in our Way, than would have been needful, if we had not gone out of it. And,

(5.) Lastly; there is this yet farther Reason to say that there is Difficulty in a virtuous Course of Life, because tho' we keep well on in the narrow Way to Life, with very few and very small Deviations from it, yet still it requires much Patience to hold on to the End. For we cannot be at the End of our Way, till we are come to an End of our Life; and after we shall have gone ever so long in it, yet if at last we forsake it, it will be as ill for us as if we had never enter'd into it. So we are plainly told, *Ezek. xviii. 24. When the righteous turneth away from his Righteousness, and committeth Iniquity, and doth according to all the Abominations that the wicked Man doth—all his Righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his Trespas that he hath trespassed, and in his Sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.*

Thus the *Gate* and the *Way to Life* are *strait* and *narrow*; which was the first Point to be spoken to. There is great Difficulty in the Tenor of a virtuous and godly Life, and we shall but deceive our selves if we think other-

wise, and shall find our Mistake, when we come to make trial what it is to live well.

2. The second Point to be spoken to was the contrary Conditions and Qualifications of the *Gate* and *Way* which lead to *Destruction*; *wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction*.

But I shall defer speaking to that Point now, and what remains to another Opportunity, and shall conclude this present Discourse with two or three useful Inferences, which may be drawn from what has been already said, concerning the Difficulty which there must be granted to be in a virtuous Course of Living; *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life*. And,

1. The *Way* being *narrow*, and especially the *Gate* entering into it being *strait*, and it being consequently, as was noted before, such a great Advantage to have been passed thro' this *Gate* in the Childhood or first Beginning of Life; hence all Parents, and others who have the Care of Youth committed to them are admonished, as well in Kindness to their Children, as in Discharge of their own Duty, to *bring them up*, as the *Apostle* speaks, *in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*; that is, to teach them the *Way* they are to go, and to encourage them to take it; to shew them the Danger of Sin, and to preserve and keep them, as much as lies in their Power, by Admonition, by Reproof, and by seasonable and discreet Correction, from ever entering upon any wicked Course. It will be much easier for the Parent, Guardian, or Master, to prevent the first Beginning of Sin in the Children under his Care, than it will be for the Children themselves when they shall be grown up, to alter those evil Habits and Customs, which by the Carelessness and Neglect of those who had the Charge of them, they were in their Childhood suffered to contract; and the Children being set at first into the right *Way*, and being got thro' the *Gate*, which is the straitest Part of it, without any Difficulty, it may reasonably be hoped, that the lesser Difficulties which they meet with afterwards will not discourage them from proceeding in it; especially when being grown up they will clearly see, that the *Way* they were enter'd into is the best *Way* they could take, indeed the only *Way* which leads to Life and Happiness at the last.

2. Since it must be granted, and our *Saviour* himself here expressly affirms, that the *Gate* which lets into the *Way*, and the *Way* it self which leads to *Life*, are *strait* and *narrow*; that is, that the Condition to be performed by us, in order to our attaining everlasting Happiness, is a Matter of great Difficulty, this may serve to caution us by no means to defer taking in hand immediately that Work which it will cost us so much Time and Pains to perfect; and especially not to defer it to a Death-bed, as if we could be able then in a few Days, or Hours, or Minutes, when our Strength is gone, and our Breath almost spent, to go all that *Way* which God designed for the Work of our whole Life and for which indeed our Life is little enough. Certainly they who flatter themselves with Hopes that how carelessly or wickedly soever they live shall be able upon a Death-bed to do all which is necessary to fit and qualify themselves for eternal Life, cannot believe what our *Saviour* here says of the Straitness and Narrowness of the *Way* to Heaven; for if a Death-bed Repentance be a *Way* which will certainly bring to Heaven, we cannot well desire a shorter or an easier *Way* than that is. Indeed,

3. The *Way* to Heaven being, as our *Saviour* here says, *strait* and *narrow*, this may make us justly suspect whether any *Way* which we are directed to, or are inclined to take, if it seems very broad and easy, be the right *Way* or no. I mean this; though it be very certain that the Practice of Piety and Virtue, does, in many Instances, tend to promote the Ease and Comfort of this Life, yet because in the general it is not so plea-

sing to our Senses, nor so conducing to our temporal Wealth and Prosperity as some Sorts of Sins are; if in any Instance which we can have any reasonable Doubt of, whether it be good or bad, lawful or unlawful, it be very apparent that it is much more for our temporal Interest to do it than not to do it; for this very Reason we ought to have the greater Doubt about it, and should not proceed to Action, till we have examin'd the Matter more carefully, and are more fully satisfied in our Minds concerning it. For the broader, and fairer, and smother any Way is, and the more apparently it is for our temporal Interest to go in it, it is, upon this very Account, the more likely to be the wrong Way; the Pleasantness of it, though it be not a certain Argument that it is the wrong Way, is nevertheless a just Prejudice against it, and may reasonably put us upon enquiring more strictly concerning it, before we adventure to go boldly in it; and, on the contrary, that side of the Question may reasonably be judged to be most probably the true and the right side of it, which favours our worldly Interest the least, because, for this very Reason, it answers better to that Character which our *Saviour* here gives us of the Way to Life in general, *viz.* that it is *strait* and *narrow*; that is, in sundry Respects not so easy and commodious and delightful as the Way of Sin seems to be.

4. Lastly; There being such great Difficulties, and so many Impediments in the *Way* which leads to *Life*, as our *Saviour* himself here grants, when he allows, or rather affirms, it to be a *strait* and *narrow* Way; the Consideration hereof ought to prepare us with a strong Resolution to undertake it, with a Resolution to put forth our utmost Strength in a vigorous Opposition of all Things which make Resistance to us, and would hinder us either from beginning or proceeding in it. A good Life, though it be not impossible, is not, yet, so very easy a Matter as some seem to think it; and therefore in Scripture it is likened to *Running*, to *Wrestling*, to *Fighting*, and such like Exercises, which require great Courage, Strength, and Patience to perform them well. And therefore also St. *Luke*, where he relates this same Precept of our *Saviour*, relates it, not just as St. *Matthew* does here, *enter ye in at the strait Gate*, but, *strive to enter in at the strait Gate*. And he adds this good Reason for our so doing, *viz.* that a faint Effort or Endeavour will not be sufficient; *strive to enter in at the strait Gate, for many, says our Saviour there, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

And that is indeed a very good Reason for our striving to enter in, but that is a better which is given in the Text, *viz.* because this, and this only, is the *Gate* and *Way leading to Life*. Or rather, both together are the most forcible Inducement to us to follow the Direction which is in both Places given us by our *Saviour*, *enter ye in at the strait Gate*, and *strive to enter in*; we must strive to do it, because there is Difficulty in it; but how difficult soever it be we ought not to be thereby discourag'd, because this is the *Gate* and *Way* to everlasting Blessedness; *enter ye in at the strait Gate, for strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life.*

And may God of his Goodness direct us all to this Way, and by the powerful Assistance of his Grace keep us always stedfast in it, for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, &c.

DISCOURSE LXXX.

The Pleasantness of a wicked Life no
just Recommendation of it.

MATTH. VII. 13, 14.

*Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate,
and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction,
and many there be which go in thereat.*

*Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way,
which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find
it.*



OUR *Saviour* having in the foregoing Part of this *Sermon* upon the Mount bound his Disciples to stricter Duty in several Instances than Men had been bound before, it was very proper now to say somewhat to encourage them to undertake it, and to remove that Backwardness and Unwillingness which they might have thereto.

And tho' there are indeed several other Impediments of a godly and Christian Life, yet there are two especially which seem to be of the greatest Force; one whereof is its seeming Difficulty, the other its Singularity.

These therefore our *Saviour* here removes; but he does it, not by denying that the Way of strict Virtue and Godliness is indeed both strait and difficult, and likewise solitary and lonesome, he rather grants both these; but by shewing that neither of these are reasonable Discouragements to a good Life; because that other Way which seems to Men to be the most pleasant, and which has the most Company in it, leads at last to Death; whereas this, which is indeed narrower, and which for that Reason very few in Comparison can be persuaded to go in, leads at last to eternal Life and Happiness, and that there is no other Way leading thither by this: *Enter ye in at the strait Gate, &c. — find it.*

In discoursing on which Words I have formerly propounded to do these two Things.

I. To consider, what Ground there is for the Objection which is here intimated to lie against the Practice of those Duties, which the Christian Institution lays upon us; or how far it is true, and must be granted, that the *Way of Virtue and Godliness is strait and lonesome; strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way—and few there be that find it*: And, on the other side, how far it is true, and must likewise be granted, that the *Way of Vice and Wickedness is wide and pleasant, and very full of Company; wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way—and many there be that go in thereat*. And,

II. To shew, that considering the different Ends to which these Ways do lead at the last, the *strait Way to Life*, and the *broad Way to Destruction*, neither is the *Straitness and Lonesomeness* of that a reasonable *Discouragement* to us from going in it; neither is the *Broadness* of this, and the good Store of *Company* which we shall meet with in it, a reasonable Inducement to us to go in *this*; but that still it is our Interest as well as our Duty, and what if we are wise we shall all chuse to do, to *enter in at that Gate*, and to go in *that Way* which lead to *Life*; tho' they be strait, and narrow, and lonesome; and to avoid the *Gate and Way* which lead to *Destruction*, tho' they be wide and broad, and much more frequented than the other are. *Enter ye in at the strait Gate.*

I. I was to consider, what Ground there is for that Objection, which is intimated in the Text to lie against the Practice of those Duties which the Christian Institution lays upon us; or how far it is true, and must be granted, 1. That the *Way of Virtue and Godliness is strait and narrow; strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life*. 2. That the *Way of Vice and Wickedness is wide and pleasant; wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction*. And, 3. That the *Way of Vice and Wickedness is much more frequented than the Way of Virtue and Godliness; there are many that go in that, and but few that do find this*.

1. That the *Way of Virtue and Godliness is strait and narrow: Strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life*. And as to this Point I have already observed; that the *Way of Virtue and Godliness is strait and narrow*, or that there may well be said to be great Difficulty in a good Life. 1. Because that to begin a good Life, especially after a wicked Course, is indeed a Work of the greatest Difficulty; *the Gate is strait*. 2. Because a strict Course of Virtue is what our naturally vitious Inclinations, and acquired evil Customs, do render us very averse to. 3. Because the *Way of strict Virtue is narrow*, it is like a right Line, the least Deviation is Crookedness. 4. Because every Deviation from the *Way* creates us a new Trouble, to return into it again at the same Place where we went out. And, 5. Lastly, because it is no going at all in the *Way to Life*, unless as we begin well, we also continue to the End in well-doing.

And from hence I observed, by way of Inference, 1. The Obligation which lies on Parents, in Kindness to their Children, as well as for the Discharge of their own Duty, to set them as soon as is possible into this good Way, thereby to save them the Trouble of a first Entrance into it, which indeed is the greatest Difficulty of all in a good Life. 2. The Obligation which lies on us all to take in hand immediately, if we have not yet done it, that Work which will cost us so much Time and Labour to perfect; and especially not to defer it to a Death-bed, when it is to be feared we shall not be able to do it. 3. That in any Matter of Practice, of which we have Reason to doubt whether it be lawful or not; if to do it, or not to do it, be evidently for our worldly Interest or Pleasure, that is a good Reason not

to do, as we are thereby inclined, till we are more fully satisfied about it; because that is most likely to be our Duty, which seems the most difficult; and that most likely to be sinful, which promises the most present Pleasure or worldly Advantage: For *strait is the Way that leads to Life*. And, 4. That in Consideration of the Difficulties we may likely meet with in a virtuous Course of Life, we ought to set about it with a Resolution to put forth our utmost Strength in a vigorous Opposition to whatever makes Resistance to us, and would hinder us either from beginning or proceeding in it: *Strive*, says St. Luke, *to enter in at the strait Gate*; without striving we shall not be able to enter into it; *for many*, it there follows, *shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*.

And now I proceed to the second Point which I was to consider and speak to; viz.

II. The contrary Conditions and Qualifications of the Gate and Way leading to Destruction: *Wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction*.

The Truth of which, and how far it is true, will appear, if these following Things be considered.

1. Even the Gate it self which leads into this Way is wide; *wide is the Gate*. Now the Gate, as I observed before, is not ordinarily made so wide as the Passage is which it leads to. It was not so in the other Gate which opens to the Passage or Way leading to Life, neither is it so in this Gate opening into the Way which leads to Destruction. But however even this Gate, tho' it be straiter than the Way which it opens into, is yet, in Comparison with the strait Gate before spoken of, exceeding wide. For even the Beginning of a Course of Sin is very easy, and in a Manner natural to us: It is natural, because our Nature it self is very corrupt and prone to Sin; we need no Tutors to instruct us in Vice, we learn that but too readily from our selves. We need no Temptations to allure us to Sin, being too often our own Tempters; *every Man is tempted*, says St. James, *when he is drawn away of his own Lust and inticed*. And yet we meet with Instructors in Sin, and Tempters to it good Store in this miserable and naughty World; so that unless we be very early taught our Duty, and persuaded of the Necessity of Religion, we readily and naturally fall into the broad Way to Destruction, which opens wider and wider to us every Day that we walk in it. For it may be considered,

2. That when once we are got thro' the Gate which opens into a Course of Sin, the Way presently divides into innumerable Paths; all which, tho' they seem to go very wide from one another, do yet meet together at last, and end in Death and Destruction. I mean this; the Way of Sin is manifold and various, so that if one Path does not please, another will. When once we have let loose the Reins, and suffer our selves to walk according to the Desires of our own wicked Heart, we are exposed to Temptations of different Kinds, by some or other of which we shall be easily ensnar'd and overcome, there being no natural Temper, Inclination, or Desire, to which some Sin or other does not offer and promise somewhat which is grateful and agreeable; no Age of Life to which the Practice of some Sin or other does not seem suitable. So that when we are satiated, or perhaps wearied with some Sorts of Sin, we shall readily betake our selves to some other, which for the present suits us better, but will as certainly bring us to Destruction, as the former would have done, if they had been continued in.

3. The Way of Sin may be said to be broad and easy, because Sin is more agreeable to our corrupt Nature and Inclinations than strict Piety and Virtue; for we all naturally love and desire Liberty, and all Rule and Restraint is un-

easy

easy to us. Now the Way of Sin is seemingly a Way of the greatest Liberty; he that allows himself in Sin does in every Thing according to his own Heart's Desire, he denies himself no Pleasure or Gratification which he has a Fancy for. And upon that Account,

4. The Way of Sin may be said to be wide and broad, viz. because it promises a great deal of Pleasure and Delight. A Life of Wickedness has an Appearance of much Mirth and Jollity; and however they who have pursued it for some Time have always found themselves deceived, and that they have either had no Fruit in those Things whereof afterwards they were ashamed, or that the Pleasure they have taken in sinful Gratifications has not been sufficient to compensate for the Pain which follows after. Tho' they have found the Way they have passed thro', not so smooth and even as it appeared before they went in; yet still the Way which is before them looks so very pleasant, that they can't persuade themselves to doubt but that they shall take very great Delight in it. And,

5. This is another Thing which makes the broad Way to Destruction appear still broader, and pleasanter, and more inviting; because the longer Men have gone in it, the less sensible they are of its Badness and Danger. For the Inclination to any Sin increases, and grows more powerful by Custom; and the longer we have lived in a sinful Course, the less Fear we have of the Evils which attend it. Our own Conscience also checks us less than before, or we grow more deaf to its Clamours, when we have been long used to them; and in Time we become quite hardied: So that tho' we should take no more Pleasure directly in, and from the Sin, than we did before, yet this Pleasure will appear greater, because it will not be accompanied or followed with so much Pain and Remorse of Mind, as it was when we first entered upon a sinful Course.

6. Lastly, the farther we go on in the Way of Sin, the pleasanter it still appears, because the farther we go on in it, the more difficult it is to return back; and therefore when we must either go on, or return, and when the farther we go on, both the Prospect of the Way before us appears still pleasanter, and the Difficulty of returning back appears still every Day (as indeed it is) greater and greater; the Increase of Difficulty which there is in Repentance, does in some Sort add to the Pleasure of a sinful Life: At least it inclines Men very strongly, to go on in the Course they have begun, and to think that they can't alter it without such intolerable Trouble as they can by no means ever persuade themselves to be at.

Thus the Gate and Way leading to Destruction are wide and broad; which was the second Point to be spoken to.

The practical Inferences from which are such as these; which (they being in Effect the same which had been drawn from the first Point, viz. the Straightness of the Way to Life) I shall but just name.

1. The Gate or the Way leading to Destruction being so much wider than that leading to Life, and being consequently more likely to be taken by such as consider not the Difference of the several Ends to which they lead; for it is natural, when two Ways are before us, and we have no Judgment to discern which is the rightest, to be inclin'd to take that which seems the broadest and fairest; it hence plainly appears, how much it is the Duty of Parents, and of others who have the Care of Children lying on them, to keep a narrow and strict Watch over them, to prevent their taking a wrong Course at first. For the Way which they first take to, they will be very apt to proceed in; it will be much harder to recover them from a sinful Course, than to prevent their falling into it. The Children therefore being not, in their Childhood, of competent Judgment and Discretion to chuse wisely for themselves, it lies upon their Parents and Guardians to chuse for them. This is Part of their Care; indeed

indeed it is the great Care of all, which God has laid upon them with Regard to their Children; which if they neglect to discharge, the Destruction which their Children will plunge themselves into by pursuing an evil Course, will be in great measure owing to them, and will bring upon them the greater Condemnation.

2. The Gate being wide, and the Way still broader which lead to Destruction, and this Way still widening more and more, the farther we go in it; we may hence see; and seeing, I hope we shall be warned to avoid; the great Danger which they run; who once allow themselves in any sinful Practice, of being *harden'd thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin*. It is easy to begin a sinful Course, but when we have begun it, we shall find it very hard to put a Stop to it; because how strong soever the Temptation to it was at first, after once yielding it tempts stronger the second Time, and stronger still the third Time; and every Time after that we give way to it, it gains still greater Strength and Power, and we become more unable to make Resistance. This they find to be true, by their own sad Experience, who are entangled in a wicked Course; they see themselves caught in a Snare, but how to release themselves they know not; they are *taken Captive by the Devil at his Will*, and tho' they sometimes intend and perhaps resolve, that they will break off his Chains, yet very seldom have they the Courage and Strength to do it; nay indeed there are but few who have the Heart so much as to attempt it; and the Reason is, because the farther they go, the Way before them seems still broader and pleasanter, and the Retreat still more tedious and difficult. And therefore,

3. Lastly; our Aptness and Readiness to proceed farther in the broad Way leading to Destruction, after we are once enter'd into it, being in great measure occasion'd by the Difficulty of returning back, and this Difficulty increasing every Day the farther we go on in it; we may hence see the Reasonableness and Necessity of a speedy Repentance for any single Act of Sin which we have fallen into, and much more for any Habit of any Sin which we have contracted. For the farther we err from the right Way, the more we must needs have to go back, before we can return into it: So that whatever Unwilliness we may have at present to undergo this Trouble, Time will certainly increase it; and whatever Reasons we have at present to delay our Repentance to any farther Time, when that Time is come, those same Reasons will appear stronger than they do now, and other Reasons as good will every Day be added to them. *To Day therefore, while it is called to Day, harden not your Hearts:* The present is the best Time we shall ever have to begin our Repentance in; if we let slip the present Opportunity we may never have any other at all, most certainly we never shall have any other so good as this.

And so much for the second Thing: *Wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction.* It follows; and that was the third Point to be spoken to,

3. *And many there be that go in thereat;* whereas, on the other side, there are few that find the Way to Life; and fewer still, who when they have found it, can be persuaded to go in it.

And the Reason is obvious, viz. because that Gate is wide, and this strait; because that Way is broad, and this narrow; because that is to appearance a much pleasanter Way to go in than this; and that the wide and the broad and the pleasant Way should have more Company in it than the other, which is straiter and more difficult, is no Marvel at all.

But this being a Matter of Fact, there is no Need of giving any Reason of it; for good Reason why it should be so none can be given, as I shall shew by and by; and that it is so, we may be better assured from our own Observation, than we could be from any Reasons.

indeed

It must be granted therefore to be true which our *Saviour* here observes, and if he had not made the Observation, we our selves must have done it, that the Number of sincerely good Men, who make it their constant Exercise to keep in all Things a *Conscience void of Offence both towards God and towards Men*, is, in Comparison with those, who either have no Religion, or if they have any, are not however so scrupulous and precise, and so careful to avoid all Appearance of Evil, as the Gospel enjoins us to be, very small and inconsiderable.

And in Consequence of this it must likewise be farther granted, that whoever is resolv'd to keep strictly to his Duty in every Point, must expect to be despis'd and reproach'd and ill used; not only by the profess'd Scorners of Religion, for their Reproaches might be more easily born; but likewise by the greatest Part of those, who have a Form of Religion, but who yet, he will see, do generally allow themselves greater Liberty than he thinks he can with a safe Conscience take, and who will think it necessary, for their own Justification and Defence, to laugh at and run down as foolishly scrupulous, and ridiculously precise, all those who dare not take to themselves so much Liberty as they do.

And from what has been said on this third Point we may observe, by way of Inference, that since the Way to Life is not so much frequented as the Way which leads to Destruction, since there are many who go in this, and but few in Comparison who go in that; it is plainly our safest and wisest Course, in all Cases wherein we are capable of doing it, to see with our own Eyes, and to judge for our selves both in Matters of Faith and in Matters of Practice; and neither to believe with an implicit Faith, nor to suffer our selves to be led blindfold without seeing our own Way by the Examples of others. For they, whoever they are who prescribe to our Belief, or set us an Example of Life, may be in the Wrong as well as in the Right; and it is odds but they are so, there being more who err from the right Way than who keep on stedfastly in it. Nay tho' there be ever so many who agree in any Point of Belief or Practice, yet still it is by no means safe to be led by them, or to follow them at all Adventures; for *wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be that go in thereat*; so that Number or Multitude on any side is so far from being a good Argument that that is the right Side, that it is rather a probable Argument that it is the wrong; *the Way of Life* being, as our *Saviour* here says, *strait and narrow, and found but by a few*.

Thus I have shewn what Ground there is for this Objection, here intimated, against the Practice of those Duties which the *Christian* Institution lays upon us; or how far it is true and must be granted, that the *Way of Virtue and Godliness* is *strait and lonesome*; *strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way—and few there be that find it*; and, on the other Side, how far it is likewise true and must be granted, that the *Way of Vice and Wickedness* is *wide and pleasant*, and very full of Company. *Wide is the Gate and broad is the Way—and many there be that go in thereat*.

And this was my first general Head of Discourse on these Words. I proceed now to the second, which was,

II. To shew, that considering the Different Ends to which these two Ways do lead, the *strait, narrow and lonesome Way to Life*, and the *wide, broad and well frequented Way to Destruction*; neither is the *Straitness and Lonesomeness* of that, a reasonable Discouragement to us from going in it; neither is the *Broadness* of this, and the good Store of Company which we shall meet with in it, a reasonable Inducement to us to go in this; but that still it is our Interest, as well as our Duty, and what, if we are wise, we shall

chuse to do, to *enter in at that Gate*, and to go in *that Way* which lead to *Life*, though they be strait and narrow and lonesome; and to *avoid the Gate* and *Way* which lead to *Destruction*, tho' they be wide and broad, and much more frequented than the other: *Enter ye in at the strait Gate.*

The Time will not permit me to say much upon this Head; and therefore I shall comprise all I have to say in a few Words. And indeed in so plain a Case many Words would be needless.

1. Then, I say that the *Straitness* of the *Way* that leads to *Life* is no just *Discouragement* to us from going in it, considering to *what* it leads, and to *what* it will surely bring us at last. For if we have any *Notion* at all of that eternal *Life* which is at the End of the *Way*, even tho' we should think it no better in its Kind than that temporal *Life* is which we lead here, yet how can we but think it worth our while to be at some Pains, and to endure some Hardships, for the obtaining of it? When we see Men so indefatigable as they generally are, rising early, and going to Bed late, and all to get wherewithal to support this temporal *Life*; a *Life* that cannot be supported long, a *Life* in which there is, at the best, such a Mixture of Misery, that it is hardly worth the keeping; can we think it strange, can we think it a hard and unreasonable Imposition that we are bidden to labour and take Pains for that *Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*? Especially, for that also I make no Question I may truly add; especially, I say, when that eternal *Life* is to be obtain'd with less Carefulness, Solicitude and Labour than Men do commonly spend in providing for this momentary *Life*, and that too when they are not sure that all the Pains they can take will be sufficient for that Purpose? And,

2. There is as little Reason that we should be discouraged from going in this *Way* by the *Lonesomeness* of it; for tho' our Saviour here says that there are but few who go in the *Way* to *Life*, yet a few are some; nay these few are, as I have already shew'd, a great many, although in Comparison with a much greater Number they may be reckoned but a few. So that we shall not need ever to fear being alone, if we travel in this *Way*. There may not be perhaps so much Company in this *Way* as there is commonly in the other, but they are better Company than the others are; and there is Company enough in it to keep us in Countenance, and to make our Journey tolerably easy and pleasant.

But if it were not so; if a Man who designed to travel in this *Way* could yet get none at all to bear him Company in it; yet even this would not be a reasonable Discouragement. For is it not better to be happy alone, than to be miserable in much Company? Nay do we not in other Cases reckon it rather better to be singular than not, when we esteem what we are singular in to be an Excellency or Advantage? Is not the rich Man rather better pleased with his Riches, because there are none else so rich as himself? Does not the honourable Person think himself rather the more honourable, because he has no Equal in Honour? Does not every Man set rather a greater Value upon any good Thing which he has, because there is none else possess'd of the same Good but himself? I do not say that this is a good Principle, for it is plainly ungenerous, there is plainly a Mixture of Envy and Ill-nature in it. I do not therefore now offer the Consideration of the small Number of those who go in this *Way*, as a reasonable Inducement for us to go in it; for that alone would be no Reason, nay indeed it would be rather a good Reason to divert us from it, in case there was any other *Way* as good as this, and which would lead to the same End, which had more Company in it, with whom we might join our selves, and whose Society might render our Journey more pleasant. But that is not the Case here, for the *Way* which we are now speaking of, and which is now supposed to have little or no Company in it, is the *Way* to *Life* and *Happiness*, and it is the only *Way* thither; for all o-

ther Ways, which are more frequented, lead to *Death and Destruction*. It is therefore the *blessed End* that this Way leads to, which makes it reasonable to be chosen by us, without any Consideration whether it be solitary, or well frequented. And if it be true in Fact that none else will walk in it, the Consequence will be that none else will be happy; or, which is the same Thing, that we shall be the happiest of all Men; and then I say that this Consequence, though it be not indeed what we should desire, for we should desire the Happiness of all other Men as well as our own, is yet what in other Cases Men do commonly desire; for every one desires to exceed others in Riches, in Honour, in Knowledge, and whatever else is valued and esteemed as an Excellency and Advantage; it is what in other Cases Men are commonly pleased with, to think that they *have more*, or that they *know more* than other Men. And therefore I cannot see any Reason, why that should be a Discouragement to us in this Case, which in other Cases would rather animate and encourage us: I do not see why as we really desire to exceed others in other Respects, and in this World, to be the first, and the Top, so we should not as well desire to be happier in the other World than any others will be; and happier we shall certainly be than any others, if we alone do travel in the Way which leads to Life, and none else can be persuaded to bear us Company in it.

3. As the *Narrowness* of the Way to Life is not a reasonable *Discouragement* to us from going in it, so neither is the *Broadness* or present Pleasantness of the other Way a reasonable *Inducement* to us to go in *that*, for *wide indeed is the Gate, and broad is the Way*, but then it *leads to Destruction* at last. And therefore if the End be not desirable, neither can the Way which certainly and necessarily leads to it be upon any Account proper to be chosen by us.

Admit therefore that a Course of Sin is really as pleasant as they who set themselves to it hope it will be, yet it is to be consider'd, that these *Pleasures of Sin* are but *for a Season*, and that the *Wages of Sin is Death*; not the Annihilation of Soul and Body, that would be a Blessedness to a great many, but the eternal Misery of both. And who can *dwell with everlasting Burnings*? Is it possible that any Pleasure here, be it as great as it can be imagin'd, should make us sufficient Recompence for an Eternity of Torments? Are they, think you, who are now tormented in that Flame, satisfied in their Minds that the good Things which they enjoy'd in their Life-time were well bought, altho' at this extravagant Price, although they paid their Souls for the Purchase? If you cannot think this, then it is plain that the broad Way is upon no Account fit to be chosen, seeing that, what pleasant Fruit soever we may now for a Moment reap from the Practice of any Sin, the Time will come when we shall be heartily ashamed of our foolish Choice, and when, if we had the whole World to give, we would freely give it all only for one single Hour's Respite from those Torments, which yet then must be endured to Eternity. And,

4. Lastly, if all the Pleasure which can be taken in the Way that leads to Destruction is not a reasonable Inducement to us to chuse to go in that Way; much less is the *Store of Company* that we shall meet with in it, which, I presume, they who are enter'd upon a Course of Sin will not be willing to grant, is the only Pleasure of it, much less, I say, is that alone, a sufficient Motive to chuse it. For whatever Pleasure Company may yield us while we are in the Way, they can afford us no Comfort at all when we shall be come to the End of it; for the End is *Destruction*, and our own Destruction will be the same to us whether we be destroy'd singly or in Company: Our own Torment will not be the less because there are many others in the same Torment. But rather, if we shall have any Thing left of that Pity and Compassion which is natural to us now while we are upon Earth, it will be some Addition to
our

our own Misery to be encompassed about with an innumerable Company of others in the same Torment, whose sad Groans, and lamentable Howlings, and bitter Cries ever sounding in our Ears, would be alone sufficient to make our Being there extremely uneasy, though we had no Pain of our own to torment us.

Such then being the different Ends to which these two Ways here before us do lead, the one to *eternal Life*, the other to *everlasting Destruction*, whatever present difference there may be in the Ways, it cannot be a good Reason either for our *declining that*, or for our *choosing this*.

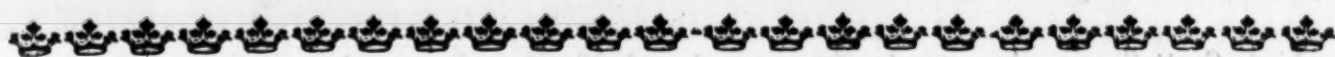
What remains then but that having Life and Death set before us, we chuse Life; and that in order to the attaining it we take the Advice which our Saviour here gives us, and *enter in at the strait Gate*; a Gate which, though strait at first, opens into a Way that is somewhat wider, and into a Way which widens still more and more the farther we go on in it; and which brings at last unto *Mount Sion*, Heb. xii. 22, &c. to the *heavenly Jerusalem*, to an innumerable Company of Angels, to the general Assembly and Church of the First-born, to the Spirits of just Men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant, and to God the Judge of all, even to the City and Throne of the living God, in whose Presence is fulness of Joy, and at whose right Hand are Pleasures for evermore.

Which God of his infinite Mercy make us all Partakers of, for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.



DISCOURSE LXXXI.

Cautions against false Prophets.



MATTH. VII. 15.

Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.



OUR Saviour in the two foregoing Verses (on which I discours'd the last Time) had directed us to *enter in at the strait Gate, i. e.* to practise diligently all those Rules of strict and holy Living, which he had given in the former Part of this *Sermon on the Mount*, or which are elsewhere prescrib'd in his *holy Gospel*. And how necessary this Advice was, both to be given and taken, he shews in the following Words; *because* the broader Way, and that which seems to allow Men greater Liberty, leads at last to Death and Destruction; and yet by Reason of the Liberty which it allows, and the Pleasure which it promises, is very apt to allure Men to take it, and does actually draw the greatest Number to it; *wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leads to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat*; whereas on the other Side, that Way which he advises us to take, tho' it be the true, and indeed the only Way to Life and Happiness, yet, being *strait and narrow, i. e.* not giving such Liberty, nor promising so much present Pleasure as the other does, is for that Reason, not so readily taken, not so much frequented as the other is; *strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

There being therefore so many more who go in the broad Way to Destruction, than who go in the narrow Way to Life; and it being natural for every one to commend the Way which he himself takes, and to endeavour to persuade others to it; it must needs be, that while we are considering with ourselves which Way we had best to chuse, a great many will offer themselves to be Guides and Directors to us. And it is not improbable, that the greatest Part of these will be Deceivers and Seducers, who, tho' they speak us fair, and pretend a mighty Concern for our Good, will yet lead us, if we follow their Direction, into the wrong Way; into that which is indeed the most frequented, but which will bring us, and all who go into it, at last to Destruction.

It was very proper therefore for our *Saviour*, after he had in the foregoing Verses prescribed our Duty, *i. e.* that we should enter into, and go in the Way which leads to Life, to prescribe also the Means proper to be us'd in order to that End; and after he had told us what we were to avoid, *viz.* the broad Way which leads to Destruction, to give us likewise the best Directions how to avoid it: And there was plainly no Direction more necessary, than that we should take great Care whom we took to our selves for a Guide, and be very cautious of trusting too much to the Skill and Honesty of our Guide, in those Cases wherein we have Ability to judge and chuse for our selves. This therefore is what he advises in the Words which I have now read to you; *Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.*

In discoursing on which Words I shall do these four Things.

I. I shall shew who, and what are the *false Prophets*, whom we are warned to beware of.

II. What the Caution here given us, to beware of them, obliges us to do.

III. Our Obligation both in Duty and Interest to beware of them. And,

IV. By what Means we may be best enabled so to do.

I. I shall shew who, and what are the *false Prophets*, whom we are here warn'd to beware of.

Now by a *Prophet* we generally understand one who being endued with a divine Spirit, or pretending so to be, foretells things to come; and then by a *false Prophet* is to be understood either, 1. One which gives out himself to be inspir'd and sent by God, when in Truth he is not; such an one, I say, is a *false Prophet*, altho' it may happen that the Thing which he foretells does come to pass; for that this might sometimes be, we are told in *Deut. xiii. 1, &c.* *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or Wonder come to pass, &c.* And yet the Prophet there spoken of is one who entices to Idolatry, and therefore most certainly is not divinely inspir'd. Or else, 2. By a *false Prophet*, we may understand one whose Predictions are prov'd to be false by the Event, and whose Pretences to divine Mission and Inspiration are thereby clearly disprov'd; according to what we read, *Deut. xviii. 22.* *When a Prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord; if the Thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the Thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.*

But the Word *Prophet* is very often in the *Old Testament*, and most commonly in the *New*, us'd in a larger Sense; a Prophet is in general any one who takes upon him to instruct Men in the Mind and Will of God; whether he pretends to do it by immediate Impulse and special Command from God, or whether he does it by Virtue of a standing Commission given by God to the Governors of the Church, to chuse and ordain fit and proper Persons to instruct the People committed to their Charge, in the Truths and Duties of Religion.

Of the former Sort, *i. e.* of such as teach by special Warrant and Command from God, was St. *John Baptist*; a Prophet, as our *Saviour* styles him, and more than a Prophet. He was one who was especially sent by God, as much as any of the ancient Prophets had been, though without the Power of working Miracles; but the foretelling Things to come was the smallest Part of his Commission; his main Business was to instruct Men in their Duty, and to persuade them to Repentance; *John did baptise in the Wilderness, and preach the Baptism of Repentance for the Remission of Sins,* says St. Mark, Mark i. 4.

Of the same Sort were likewise several in the *Apostle's Days*, who were extraordinarily illuminated from above, not with the Knowledge of Things to come, but rather, it may be said, of Things past; *i. e.* their Minds were enlighten'd with the Knowledge and right Understanding of the holy Scriptures, which they were able to give the true Sense and Interpretation of, and thereby they were excellently qualified to instruct the People in all Points of Duty, whether of Belief or Practice. Of which Gift, under the Name of *Prophecy*, St. Paul frequently speaks in his *Epistles*, particularly in 1 Cor. xiv. 1, 3. *Desire spiritual Gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.— He that prophesieth, speaketh unto Men to Edification, and Exhortation, and Comfort.*

And of the latter Sort, *i. e.* of such as teach by Virtue of a standing Commission given by God to the Governors of the Church, to chuse and ordain fit Persons to instruct the People committed to their Charge in the Truths and Duties of Religion; of this Sort, I say, I suppose were those who in the *Old Testament* are called, *the Sons of the Prophets*, but in the *Gospel* more frequently, *Scribes* or *Lawyers*, *i. e.* such as had been brought up in the Study of the Holy Scriptures of the *Old Testament*, and were therefore said by our *Saviour* to *sit in Moses Seat*, and were indeed the fittest and best qualified to be publick Instructors of the People in ordinary Times; that is, when there were none extraordinarily inspired, and especially commissioned by God to execute this Office, as there were not from the Time of the Prophet *Malachi*, to the Days of St. *John Baptist*, nor perhaps have been from the *Apostle's Days* down to our Times.

And this Notion of the Word *Prophet* for a Teacher or Preacher was so well known, and so generally allow'd of, that even the *Greek Heathen Poet Epimenides*, is by St. Paul himself, when he cites a Saying of his, in *Tit. i. 12.* call'd a *Prophet*; *one of themselves, even a Prophet of their own said, the Cretians are always Liars, &c.* And he was therefore accounted and call'd a *Prophet*, because he reprehended the Vices of Men, and gave them excellent Rules and Instructions of good Living.

And taking the Word *Prophet* in this large Sense, (which, I suppose, is the Sense wherein we ought to understand it in this Place) a *false Prophet* is either, 1. One who pretends to be specially and extraordinarily inspir'd by God, when indeed he is not; or, 2. One who assumes to himself the Office of a Guide or Teacher in the Church without being lawfully chosen and ordain'd to that Office, how well qualified soever he may be, or may think himself to be, for it; or else, 3. One who, tho' lawfully commission'd to be a publick Teacher and Instructor of the People, does not discharge his Trust faithfully, but either through Ignorance or Malice, misleads those who are committed to his Care. A *false Prophet* is a *false Teacher*; and so St. Peter seems to expound the Word, 2 Pet. ii. 1. *There were false Prophets among the People; even as there shall be false Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, &c.*

These then are the *false Prophets* whom we are here warn'd to beware of, *viz.* either such as take upon them to be Teachers, without Commission from God, either ordinary or extraordinary; or else such as teach false Doctrine.

I proceed now to the second Thing propounded, which was,
II. To shew what the Caution here given us, to *beware of false Prophets*, obliges us to do. And,

1. The chief Thing intended by this Caution was doubtless this; That we should take Care that we be not misled by such Men into any hurtful Error or sinful Practice. The Design of such Seducers is to intice us from the

the right Way into that which leads to Destruction ; or if that be not actually in their Intention, as perhaps it may not always be, they themselves being deceiv'd in the Way they have taken, and so meaning well to those whom they would persuade to bear them Company in it ; yet *that* however will be the Consequence of our being misled by them ; for, *if* (as our Saviour says) *the Blind lead the Blind, they shall both fall into the Ditch.* Our Business therefore, on the other Side, is to look well to our own Goings ; that is, by the best Helps we have, *viz.* by the Light of Reason, by the brighter Light of Scripture, and by the Assistance of those Guides whom we have Reason to think the most skilful and the most honest, to endeavour to find out the right Way ; and when we have found it, to keep on steadily in it ; and as the Apostle exhorts, *Eph. iv. 14. to be thenceforth no more Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Slight of Men, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in Wait to deceive.*

2. What was farther meant by this Caution, *beware of false Prophets*, was this ; That we should use our best Skill to discern between true and false Prophets.

Now by what Means we may do this, our Saviour himself has taught us in the Words following the Text ; *by their Fruits ye shall know them.* And what those Words mean I shall have Occasion to shew, when I shall come in Order to discourse of them. In the mean Time, this may be enough to be said at present upon this Point.

(1.) As to those who pretend to Inspiration, I say that there is no Reason to give the least Credit to their Pretences unless they can do Miracles ; and that tho' they should do, or should seem to do Miracles, yet if the Doctrine which they teach, be in any Respect wicked, and unworthy of God, we may certainly conclude that they are not sent by God. And,

(2.) As to those who do not pretend to Inspiration, I say, that if they have no Warrant or Commission to teach, we may reasonably refuse to hear them, presuming them to be *false Prophets* ; because such they plainly are, if not as to the Matter of their Doctrine, yet as to their Mission. *For how can they preach,* says the Apostle, *unless they be sent ?* And it cannot be known that they are sent, unless either they have a lawful Call, that is, are ordain'd to the Office by those to whom our Saviour has given Authority to ordain Ministers in his Church, or else can shew that they have an extraordinary Call thereto by doing *the Works of God, i. e.* such Works as cannot be done but by a Divine Power.

3. What was farther meant by this Caution, *Beware of false Prophets*, is this ; that when we have found out any Person to be a *false Prophet*, either from his groundless Pretence to Inspiration, or from the Disagreement of his Doctrine in any Point with the fundamental Truths and Articles of Christianity, we should thenceforth give no more Ear or Credit to such a Man ; because having found him to be a *false Prophet*, we can have no reasonable Security that he will not mislead and misguide us, in any other Points of Doctrine which we may not perhaps be so well able to discover the Falsity of. Thus we are to *beware of false Prophets.* The third Thing propounded was,

III. To shew our Obligation both in Duty and Interest, to *beware* of them. And this will appear, if we consider these two Things, which are both suggested to us in the Text.

1. The Danger we are in of being deluded by such Seducers, unless we use great Caution to avoid the Snares which they lay for us ; *beware of false Prophets*, for, says our Saviour, *they come unto you in Sheep's Cloathing.* And,

2. The miserable Consequence of being deceiv'd and deluded by them; *they come to you in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.*

1. If we consider the Danger we are in of being deluded by such Seducers; unless we use great Caution in avoiding the Snares which they lay for us: *Beware of false Prophets, for they come unto you,* says our Saviour, *in Sheep's Cloathing, i. e.* they appear outwardly very innocent and harmless, so that unless we have our Eyes open, and our Wits well about us, we may be destroy'd and devour'd by them, before we so much as suspect any Harm from them.

For by the *Sheep's Cloathing* which these *false Prophets* do cover themselves withal, we may well understand all the Arts and Methods which they use, to ingratiate themselves with the People, and to gain themselves Credit, that the People may fall to them, and readily receive, as Truth, whatever comes from their Mouth, without thinking it needful to trouble themselves to examine the Grounds and Reasons it is built upon.

And to this End they commonly affect to make the greatest Shew of Sanctity and Devotion, like the *Pharisees* of old, who that they might be the more taken notice of for their Piety, prayed in Places of greatest Concourse; *in the Synagogues, i. e.* wherever a Company of People were met together; or *in the Corners of the Streets, i. e.* where three or four Streets met together, so that they might be seen by a great many as they passed by: And that they might be thought to be very heavenly minded, and to take Delight in nothing so much as conversing with God, they usually drew out their Devotions to an unreasonable Length, altho' in order to that they were forc'd to cke them out with abundance of *vain* and idle *Repetitions*.

For the same Reason also such false Teachers do commonly express a more flaming Zeal for God and Religion, and those Doctrines which they teach as the great Truths of Religion, than even the best Men do for those which are indeed the great Truths of the Gospel; imitating herein also the *Pharisees* of old, who, as our Saviour testifies of them, would *compass Sea and Land*, thought no Pains too much to be taken, no Hazards too great to be run, even for the gaining of *one* single *Profelyte* to their Party. And indeed it has been generally, and I believe too very truly observ'd, that the worse the Cause is which Men are engag'd in, so much the more zealous they commonly are for it.

And lastly, That these *false Prophets* in *Sheep's Cloathing* may be the more readily taken for Sheep, they imitate the Voice of Sheep as well as put on their Cloathing; they speak very fair to those whom they mean to devour; they express the greatest Charity and Kindness to those whom they intend to make a Prey of. Thus the *Apostle*, speaking of some false Teachers in those Times, says, *Gal. iv. 17. They zealously affect you but not well, yea, they would exclude us, that you might affect them. i. e.* Their great Zeal towards you is not out of sincere Affection to you, or Desire of your Good; but they would supplant those who are your true Pastors, thereby to get all your Affection to themselves. And of the same he says, *Rom. xvi. 18. that by good Words and fair Speeches they deceive the Hearts of the Simple.*

Such then being, as to outward Shew and Appearance, the Likeness between these *Wolves in Sheep's Cloathing* and those who are Sheep indeed, it is easy to take one for the other, and therefore highly necessary that we should use all prudent Caution, that we be not deceived in them, especially if we consider yet farther in the second Place,

2. The miserable Consequence of being deceiv'd in them, and deluded by them; for notwithstanding the fair Shew which they make, they are indeed, as the Text says, *inwardly ravening Wolves*. Their Design is only to devour those whom they deceive; and so that they may but make some Gain and

Advantage to themselves, they care not what becomes of those whom they mislead. This the *Apostle* observes, *Rom. xvi. 18.* and by this Argument he inforces a Caution which he had before given, of the same Sense with this in the Text: *Mark them, says he, which cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own Belly.* And in *1 Tim. vi. 3, &c.* having spoken of some false Prophets, who taught otherwise than he had done, and consented not to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according to Godliness, he calls them *Men of corrupt Minds, and destitute of the Truth, who suppose that Gain is Godliness; from such, says he, withdraw thy self.* And in *Tit. i. 11.* speaking of the like unruly and vain Talkers and Deceivers, he says, that they subverted whole Houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy Lucre's sake. And St. Peter says of the same Sort of Persons, *2 Pet. ii. 3. Thro' Covetousness shall they with feigned Words make Merchandise of you.* And the same our Saviour had observ'd before concerning the hypocritical Pharisees, viz. that Religion was only a Pretence, and their own Gain and Profit all that they intended. *Matth. xxiii. 14. Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye devour Widow's Houses, and for a Pretence make long Prayers.*

But that we are spoiled and made a Prey of by such Deceivers is the least Mischief of our being seduced by them; what is of much more important Consideration, is, that if we are deceived by them, it may be to our eternal Ruin and Destruction. For there is but one Way to Life, viz. the Way of Truth and strict Holiness; so that whenever we are seduced from that, we fall of Course into some other Way which leads to Destruction; and if this happens to us for want of looking well to our selves, and of using such Caution as we ought to have had, to beware of false Prophets, it will avail us nothing to plead, that we did not go out of the Way our selves of our own Choice, but were misled by those to whose Guidance we had committed our selves, and who, we hop'd, would have guided us right; for we had fair Warning given us before, that many false Prophets were gone out into the World; and this was a good Reason, why we should not believe every Spirit, but should try the Spirits whether they were of God, as St. John argues in *1 Epist. iv. 1.* We had been told before by St. Paul, *Acts xx. 29.* that after the Apostles departing grievous Wolves would enter in, not sparing the Flock, and that of themselves also some Men should arise speaking perverse things, to draw away Disciples after them; and this was a good Reason why we should have watched. We had been told also by the same Apostle, *2 Tim. iii. 1.* that in the last Days perillous Times should come, because that a great many would have a Form of Godliness who would deny the Power thereof; and that such as these would creep into Houses, and lead captive silly Women, laden with Sins, led away with diverse lusts. This Forewarning therefore ought to have engaged us to use our best Discretion to discern them who were such, and having found them, to turn away from them, as the Apostle exhorts at the fifth Verse of that Chapter. For the Reason why God permits such false Teachers to arise, is that his People may be always upon their Guard against Seducers, and may prove the Sincerity of their Love and Obedience by withstanding the Temptation which is thereby laid in their Way. So we are told, *Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3. If there arise among you a Prophet, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, which cometh to pass, saying, Let us go after other Gods, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet, for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your Heart, and with all your Soul.* And the Apostle gives the same Reason of the Heresies which were to be in the

Christian

Christian Church, 1 Cor. xi. 19. There must be Heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

The Case then in short is this; if we do *beware of false Prophets*, if we are careful to find out who are such, and having found them, are careful not to be misled by them; as our Virtue in resisting such a Temptation is greater than if we had not met with any such Temptation, so it will be rewarded with an higher Degree of Glory; but if we fall by it, we are no more excusable than if we had fallen by any other Temptation. They indeed, who do seduce, will be punish'd more severely than they who are seduc'd by them; but nevertheless, they who are seduced, especially if their own Want of Care and Caution was the Cause of their being seduc'd, must not look to escape; for as our *Saviour* says, in the Words before cited, *If the Blind lead the Blind, they shall both fall into the Ditch*; if Men go in the broad Way which leads to Destruction, they will assuredly be destroyed, whether they lead or whether they follow; they who go together in the same Way, must come to the same End at last.

Having seen therefore now, who are the *false Prophets* whom we are to beware of, and what it is to *beware* of them, and the great Reason which we have so to do, I proceed to the fourth and last Thing propounded, which was,

IV. To shew by what Means we may be best enabled to beware of them.

And the surest Method of doing this, is that which our *Saviour* himself prescribes in the Words following the Text; *by their Fruits ye shall know them.*

But of that, as I have already noted, I shall have Occasion to speak hereafter; when I come to discourse on those Words; at present therefore I shall mention only some other more general Means, which I think are proper to be used for this Purpose, and by which, even such as are not so well able to judge of them *by their Fruits*, may yet be in good Measure secur'd against the Seduction of *false Prophets*. And,

1. One good Means to be secur'd against the Seduction of false Teachers is, to accept for Teachers and Guides those, and those only, who are lawfully call'd and ordained to that Office by those, to whom by the Divine Providence the Care and Government of the Church is committed, I mean of that establish'd Church of which it was our Lot to be born Members.

And to this Rule I only make one Exception, that is, when the publick Doctrine of the Church, to which all who are allowed to be Ministers in the same must be supposed to have subscribed, or to have declared their Assent; when, I say, the publick Doctrine of the Church whereof we are Members, is manifestly wicked and corrupt, and may be easily prov'd to be so, by the clear Dictates of natural Reason, or plain Texts of Scripture: For in this Case, indeed, I cannot say, it is the safest and wisest Way for a Man to submit to the Direction of those Guides, who, upon Supposition (which must be suppos'd) that their Doctrine will be the same with that of the Church, of which they are Ministers, he is sure will mislead him, if he follows their Direction. I would not therefore advise a Man who lives in a Church of the *Roman Communion*, the publick and allow'd Doctrine of which he must needs know, if he be at all acquainted with the holy Scripture, to be very corrupt, and in many Points directly contrary to the Doctrine of the Gospel; I would not, I say, advise such an one, to rely with Confidence upon the Direction of the Guides of that Church, of whose Ignorance or Dishonesty he is so well assur'd; but rather I would advise him to withdraw himself from such a corrupt Communion, and to use the best of his Discretion to find out a purer Church to which to join himself, and in which he might reasonably hope to meet with Guides of greater Skill, or more Honesty.

*

But,

But, I say, except in that one Case, and especially if after comparing, in the best Manner we are able, the Doctrine of the Church we live in with the Doctrine of the Scripture, we find them very agreeable with, and consonant to each other; it is, I think, the wisest and the safest Course that a Man can take, to continue in the Communion of that Church in which he was born, and to submit, in the general, to the Direction of those Guides, who by the publick Authority of the establish'd Church are commission'd to have the Guidance and Oversight of the People, rather than to accept of any other Person for a Guide, who is not so authoris'd and commission'd; what Brags soever he may make of his greater Skill, or what specious Shew soever he may make of Piety and Sincerity.

For this we think our best Prudence in all other Cases of the like Nature.

Thus, for Instance, when we are sick, we think it better to take the Advice of a licens'd Physician, whose Skilfulness has been examin'd, and whose Ability has been allow'd of by those who are best able to judge thereof, than to trust our Lives in the Hands of any other Man who is not so approv'd and licens'd, tho' he talks of himself much more confidently than the other does, and pretends to have an infallible Remedy for every Disease. And yet it is possible, that some who are not licens'd to practise Physick, may have very good Skill in it, and that some who are licens'd may not be so skilful therein as might be wish'd.

And thus also, if we were to travel in a difficult Way, over a wild Heath or Desert, in a Way not easily to be found without a Guide; or if we were to ford a River which was fordable but in one Place, and that a narrow Track or Causeway which a Stranger to it could hardly light upon; and if to prevent the Inconvenience which might happen to Travellers through Mistake, the Government of the Country had licens'd some certain Persons, of such as had been examin'd and were known to be skilful in the Way or Ford, and had ordered them to be ready on all Occasions to guide and conduct ignorant Travellers therein; who would not think it a wiser Course to commit himself to the Conduct of one of these licens'd or authoris'd Guides, than to trust to the Guidance of any other Person, who boasted much of his own Skill, but could not produce a publick Testimonial thereof? Who would not think that he had a better moral Assurance of the Skilfulness and Fidelity of that Guide, who had been examin'd and approv'd of, and had been authoris'd to be a Guide by those who were the best Judges of a Man's Sufficiency for that Office, and who had also given Security that he would discharge it faithfully to the best of his Skill and Power, than he could have only from a Man's own Testimony concerning himself? And yet in this Case it would be possible, that some, who were not so publicly authoris'd, might have as good Understanding in the Way or Ford as any of these licens'd Guides.

And the Case is much the same in the Matter we are now speaking of; it is possible, that a Man who offers himself to be a Guide to us in our spiritual Concerns, and who comes to us of himself without being sent, may have studied the Scriptures very well, and may have attain'd good Skill and Knowledge in that Way to Heaven which he offers to guide us in; but I say, that whether he has such Skill or not, we cannot so well be assured, as we may be of their Ability and Integrity, who are authoris'd and commission'd to execute the Office of spiritual Guides to the People, by those who are best able to judge of the Qualifications which are necessary for the well-discharging of that Office; by those, to whom also the Care and Government of the *Christian Church* is committed by *Christ* himself, the great *Shepherd and Bishop of our Souls*. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

If therefore we are well satisfied that the Doctrine of the Church we live in, as taught in her *Articles of Religion*, in her *Homilies*, and in her *Liturgy*; and which all who are allow'd to exercise the Office of Ministers therein must at least make an outward and open Profession of; and contrary to which they cannot teach, without being therefore liable to be censur'd; if, I say, we are satisfied that the Doctrine of the established Church which we are Members of, is in the general true and good, and agreeable to the holy Scriptures; it is plainly our wisest Course to accept of, and submit our selves to, those spiritual Guides, who by the publick Authority of the Church are appointed to conduct us, rather than of our own Heads to chuse Guides to our selves out of such as offer themselves to the Office, but are not lawfully commission'd to execute the same; and of whose Ability and Integrity we cannot consequently be so well assured, as we may be of theirs, who come to us with publick Warrant and Authority.

For in case those Teachers, whom we according to our own liking do make Choice of, should indeed be as skilful and as honest, and every way as sufficient as those whom the Church had appointed to instruct us; there would be however no Praise at all due to us upon this Account, it being by good Chance only, not by Prudence, that we happen'd to make so lucky a Choice. In this Case all which can be said is, that it was our Fortune to fall into good Hands, when at the same Time a great many others who took the same Course, and shewed as much Wisdom in the Choice of a Guide as we did, were by the Guide whom they had chosen deceived and misled to their eternal Ruin. And however Men may, and do sometimes fare better in this World for their being fortunate, it may well be doubted whether any shall do so in the other; and if they shall not, I think it must be said that the Reason is, because there was such a great Mistake committed in the first Step which they took, (*i. e.* in chusing a Guide for themselves, when they had no good Reason to except against those Guides which the Church had provided) as could never afterwards be rectified by the best Rules and Directions which could be given them.

So that I do not know, whether I may not say, that the Condition even of them who happen to be misled by following the Directions of those Teachers whom God in his Providence has plac'd over them, is as hopeful as theirs, who merely by good Chance and Accident happen'd on such as were better able to teach them. But this I am sure I may say, that the Error of such as are led into Error by those Teachers who were lawfully ordained and appointed to instruct them, is much more excusable, than the same or the like Error is in others, who are led into it by those Teachers whom they themselves, *having itching Ears*, as the *Apostle* speaks, *have heaped up to themselves*. And this I am also sure I may say farther in general, that the Case of those who being not able to find out the right Way themselves, have mistaken it thro' the Ignorance or Deceit of those who were by lawful Authority appointed to guide them, is very pitiable and pardonable, because they did all which they prudently could do to avoid Mistake; for so far as they were able to find out the right Way by their own Skill, they walked in it, and when they were at a Loss, they followed the Directions of those spiritual Guides, under whose Care the divine Providence had plac'd them. And what could they have done more or better than this? For a Man who knows not the Way himself, can hardly be suppos'd to have Judgment enough to discern who is fit to guide him. Having therefore taken the wisest Course which in those Circumstances they could take, having done all which was in their Power to do to avoid Error; we may reasonably think that that Mistake which after all they did fall into, will not be imputed to them as a Fault, by a merciful God; or if it be, yet that they shall obtain Pardon for it by a general

Confession of, and Repentance for, all their secret and unknown Sins; such as that of the *Psalmist*, *Psal. xix. 12. Who can understand his Errors? Oh! cleanse thou me from my secret Faults.* Whereas on the other Side, they who are misled by those Guides, whom they themselves do make Choice of, have nothing to plead in their own Excuse; they cannot transfer the Blame from themselves, as the others may in great Measure do, by casting it upon their Guides; because, that they had such ignorant or deceitful Guides, was wholly their own Fault; for they were not Guides sent them by God; they were not Guides appointed to them by the Church, but they were such as they themselves chose. It was one Fault therefore, that they accepted, and received as a Prophet, one who could give no Proof, neither ordinary, nor extraordinary, of a divine Mission; and it was another Fault, their being misled and deceived by him.

Nevertheless, I would not have what I have now said, to be so understood, as if I meant to prescribe it as the best Means to avoid Error, that we should yield a blind Obedience in all Things, to the Direction even of those spiritual Guides, which the Providence of God has placed over us; for the *Apostle St. Paul* foretels, *Acts xx. 30.* that not only *grievous Wolves* from without would enter in to devour the Flock, but that of themselves also, *i. e.* from among themselves, even in the Churches which the *Apostles* had planted with their own Hands, *some Men* would arise speaking perverse things. And the same Thing may happen at any Time, in the most pure, in the best constituted Church in the World. After all the Care which the Bishops and Governors of the Church can take (who are but Men and cannot see into the Heart) there may be some admitted into the Ministry, who are not worthy; some *false Prophets* and *deceitful Workers*, as the *Apostle* calls them, *2 Cor. xi. 13. transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ*: Or if all such could be kept out by the Care and Vigilance of Church Governors, yet still even the wisest and best Men, and the most able Guides in the Church, are but Men; they are consequently not infallible, they are subject to Ignorance and Mistake. It is not therefore, as I said, the People's Duty to yield a blind Obedience to their Directions; but they ought to see, when they can do it, with their own Eyes, and to judge as well as they are able for themselves; and if they do not, their Errors, even tho' they should be led into them by such as are their lawful Pastors, would not be excusable.

I add this therefore in the second Place, as another good Means necessary to be used by the People, to secure them against the Seduction of false Teachers, *viz.*

2. That they should examine, as well as they are able, the Doctrines even of those who are their lawful Teachers, by the Rule of Truth, *i. e.* by the Word of God. *To the Law, and to the Testimony*, says the Prophet; *if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them, Isaiah viii. 20.* Whoever they be, even tho' they be those Guides, which are set over us by God's Providence, whom in the general we are commanded to obey, and to whom in general it is our Duty to submit our selves, as you may see, *Heb. xiii. 17*: Whoever, I say, they be, who teach any Doctrine contrary to the Scripture, or not agreeable thereto, they are so far *false Apostles*, *deceitful Workers*, and such *false Prophets* as we are warned to beware of. Nay, if, as the *Apostle* speaks, *an Angel from Heaven should preach any other Gospel* to us, different from what was taught by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, he would be to be *accursed*, and by no Means to be hearkned to.

Having therefore this certain Rule for the Trial of Doctrines, it is the Duty of all those who have it, to make Tryal thereby, as well as they are able, of the Doctrines which are propos'd to them, even by their true and lawful Pastors; for even our *Saviour* himself desired no Credit to be given to his

Preaching, if it had not been agreeable to former divine Revelations; *search the Scriptures*, says he, *John* vi. 39. *for they are they which testify of me.* And when St. Paul and Silas, who had given sufficient Proof of their Commission to teach, by the Miracles which they did, preached the Gospel at Berea, it is observ'd, that the Bereans would not take what they said upon their Credit only, but that they might be fully satisfied of the Truth of it, examined it by the Scripture: And for this their Caution and Prudence we find them much commended, *Acts* xvii. 11. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

And the same Method which they took to secure themselves from Error and Deceit, is prescribed to all by the Apostles of our Lord; by St. Paul in *1 Thess.* v. 21. *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good;* and by St. John, *1 Epist.* iv. 1. *Beloved, believe not every Spirit; but try the Spirits, whether they be of God; because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.*

But to speak at large to this Point now, would prevent me in saying what will be more proper to be said, when I shall come to discourse on the next Words. I proceed therefore to add another, a third general Means of being secured from the Seduction of false Prophets; and that is,

3. That we be always very sincere in the Profession and Practice of Religion; that we take Care to keep a good Conscience in every Thing, and to practise religiously whatever we are persuaded is our Duty. And this Method we find prescribed by St. Paul, *1 Tim.* ii. 19. *Holding Faith and a good Conscience, which some having put away concerning Faith have made Shipwreck.* In which Words it is clearly intimated, that a Love of Truth and Goodness is the best Security against Error; and that they who put away a good Conscience, are in the greatest Danger of falling from the Truth into the most hurtful Heresies. And to this agree those Words of our Saviour, *John* vii. 17. *If any Man will do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.* For the Spirit of God dwells in those Men, who are of honest and upright Minds, and readily obey all the Motions and Dictates of it; and the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Truth, as able to keep us from Error as from Sin; so that if we are careful not to grieve this holy Spirit of God by any wilful Sin, and thereby provoke him to forsake us, we have no Reason to fear, but that by the same Spirit we likewise shall be led and guided into all Truth, and preserved, at least, from all dangerous and hurtful Errors.

And the contrary is what may very justly be fear'd, by all those who are not careful to live up to what they know, and especially by those, who allowing themselves in known Sin, do daily grieve the holy Spirit of God; they, I say, may justly fear, they shall be forsaken by that Spirit, which they do thus continually grieve and resist, and that they shall be given up by God to a reprobate Mind, and to all the Delusions of the Devil; according to that Threatning which we meet with in *2 Thess.* ii. 10, 11, 12. *Because they received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved; for this Cause God shall send them strong Delusions, that they should believe a Lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the Truth, but had Pleasure in Unrighteousness.*

I only add, in the fourth and last Place, one other good Means, or Expedient, to be secured from the Seduction of false Prophets; and that is,

4. Constant and earnest Prayer to God, that he would be pleased to give unto us the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the Knowledge of him, that the Eyes of our Understanding being enlightned, *Eph.* i. 17. we may be able to distinguish between Truth and Error; for it is the Lord that giveth Wisdom

dom, and out of his Mouth cometh Knowledge and Understanding, as we are told, Prov. ii. 6. This Method therefore we find prescribed by St. James, Chap. i. Ver. 5. *If any Man lack Wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*

But then, seeing we are bound to pray for others as well as for our selves, and it is a Matter of general Concern to all, that they be not seduced and misled; and yet as long as there are Seducers and Deceivers in the World, there will be great Danger that *many will follow their pernicious Ways*; it is plainly our Duty to enlarge our Petitions still farther, and to make it a Part of our Prayer to God, that he would be pleased to lay open the Deceit of all such Impostors, that *their Folly and Wickedness may be manifest to all*; and that since the Harvest is great, and the true Labourers but few, he would be pleased to send forth Labourers into his Harvest, and to grant that his Church being always preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true Pastors. Collect for St. Matthias's Day.

And because God does not now send Prophets and Teachers by special and extradiordinary Commission, as he has sometimes formerly done, but by an ordinary and stated Power, which he has vested in the Governors of his Church, the Bishops and chief Pastors thereof; it is therefore farther requisite, that at all Times, but especially at the four Seasons of the Year, which are appointed for the Ordination of Ministers, *i. e.* in the four *Ember Weeks*, of which this is one; we should comply with the good Order of the Church, and put up solemn Prayers with Fasting, upon this great Occasion; humbly beseeching God, first on the Behalf of the Bishops, that he would *so guide and govern the Minds of his Servants, the Bishops and Pastors of his Flock, that they may lay Hands suddenly on no Man, but faithfully and wisely make Choice of fit Persons to serve in the sacred Ministry of his Church*; and then in the Behalf of those who shall be called to any holy Function, that he would give them his Grace and heavenly Benediction, and so replenish them with the Truth of his Doctrine, and endue them with Innocency of Life, that they may faithfully serve before him, to the Glory of his great Name, and the Benefit of his holy Church.

All which God of his great Goodness be pleas'd to grant, for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, &c.

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DIS-

DISCOURSE LXXXII.

The Way of discerning false Prophets.

MATTH. VII. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Ye shall know them by their Fruits. Do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles?

Even so every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit, but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit.

A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit, neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.

Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down, and cast into the Fire.

Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.



OUR Saviour in the foregoing Verse had caution'd his Disciples to *beware of false Prophets*; i. e. to take Care that they were not misled by them into any hurtful Error or sinful Practice; and the Danger and Mischief of being so misled, he had intimated in the last Clause of that Verse; *inwardly they are ravening Wolves*; i. e. they destroy those whom they deceive; they draw them into the broad Way, which leads to, and ends in, Death and Destruction. And the Difficulty which there was in observing that Caution which he had given, to beware of them, he had also intimated in the foregoing Clause, *they come unto you in Sheeps cloathing*; i. e. they are oftentimes, in outward Appearance, so like to Sheep, or rather so like to the true Shepherds, that it is hard to distinguish them the one from the other.

It being therefore a Matter of no small Difficulty to know who are *true*, and who are *false Prophets*, and it being also a Matter of the greatest Importance and Concern to us that we should know them; it was very proper, and highly requisite, that our Saviour should also give us some Mark and Token whereby we might be able to distinguish them; and this he does in the Words which I am now to discourse of.

Wherein first he gives the Mark or Token by which they might be distinguish'd; *by their Fruits*, says he, *ye shall know them*.

And then by an easy and familiar Similitude he shews, that this was the best and properest Mark which could be given for this Purpose; because how like soever the *false Prophets* might be to the true ones, in outward Shew, Appearance, or Pretence, they were yet really of a quite different Sort and Kind; that they were as differing from one another in Nature, as *Wolves* are from *Sheep*; that the inward Tempers and Dispositions of their Minds were as different and unlike the one to the other, as the Sap and Juice of several Kinds of Trees is in Taste, or in Virtue and Operation.

But now two Fruit-bearing Trees, that bear Fruits of quite different Tastes and Qualities, may yet be very like one another in Shape and Proportion, or in the Figure or Colour of their Leaves or Blossoms, and so may not be easily distinguishable by the Eye only, especially not by an unskilful Eye, or upon a slight and transient Look: Nevertheless in this Case, a Man who cannot distinguish Trees by his Eye, or if he can do that, yet cannot, only by looking upon them, say, which is a good or which is a bad Tree; if he will but be at the Pains to taste of the Fruits, may easily enough distinguish between the Fruits by his Taste, or at least by their Virtue and Operation; and when he has tasted and tried both, he may then know certainly which of them is the best; and so remembering from which Tree he gather'd this Fruit, and from which that, he may afterwards be able to say with Certainty, this is a good Tree, and that is a bad one; this is fit to be preserv'd, but that other, tho' it looks as well as this, yet is fit for nothing but to be cut down and burn'd. *By their Fruits ye shall know them. Do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles? Even so, every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit, but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit. A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit, neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.*

And because those Fruit-Trees which bear Fruit not pleasant to the Taste, or not fit and wholesome for Use, are seldom permitted to cumber the Ground long, but are usually cut down and burn'd; our *Saviour* here, by the Way, and as it were in a Parenthesis, takes notice at the nineteenth Verse, that this same shall also be in due Time the Fate of false Teachers: That however they may be permitted for a while to deceive the World, their *End is Destruction*; and the Mischief which they do to others, will at last come double upon their own Heads. *Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down and cast into the Fire.*

And then, at last, at the twentieth Verse, he returns again to his former Subject, and repeats again the Advice and Direction which he had before given, and which, by the foremention'd Similitude, he had prov'd to be the best and most proper Means to avoid being seduc'd by false Prophets; *wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them*.

By which Repetition; for no Repetition of the same Thing in the holy Scripture can reasonably be thought vain, superfluous, or to no purpose; by this Repetition therefore I say, he shews that the Advice and Direction which he had before given is such as it highly concerns us carefully to observe and practise; there being no other Way whereby we can be so well secur'd against the Seduction of false Teachers, as by being able to discern who are such; for whom we know to be a false Teacher, we shall hardly give Ear and Credit to; and no such certain Way to distinguish false Teachers from true as by their Fruits. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits.* So, as I observ'd, our *Saviour* says in the first Words of the Text, and he says the same Thing again in the last Words of it; *wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them*; and what is between these two Clauses, is only an Illustration

Illustration thereof, by a plain and familiar Similitude; the Sum and Sense of which we have in fewer Words, in *Matth. xii. 33. The Tree is known by its Fruit.*

My chief Business therefore at this Time will be to explain the Rule here given us by our *Saviour*, for the discovering who are *false Prophets*, in order to our being aware of them. *Beware of false Prophets; — ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

But before I do this, and in order to the bringing what I shall have to say upon this Subject into the narrower Compass; it may not be amiss to observe again, tho' I have already said somewhat of it in my Discourse on the foregoing Words; that of Prophets, or Teachers, *i. e.* of such as take upon them to instruct Men in the Mind and Will of God, there may be reckoned four Sorts.

1. Such as, tho' pretending to immediate divine Inspiration, yet do not offer to give any Proof of their being so inspired, but expect that they should be believed upon their own Credit; *i. e.* only upon their own saying that they are divinely inspired.

2. Such as not only pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, but seem also to give such Proof of their being divinely inspir'd, as the antient *Prophets*, and as our *Lord* and his *Apostles* did; *i. e.* who either do, or at least seem to do miraculous Works; such Works as are thought by the Beholders not possible to be done, but by a divine or supernatural Power.

3. Such as teach by Virtue of an ordinary and standing Commission given by God to the Bishops and Governors of his Church, to chuse out, appoint and ordain fit Persons to instruct the People in Matters of Religion. And,

4. Lastly; such as neither pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, nor yet are commissioned and authorised by the standing Governors of the Church, the Bishops and supreme Pastors thereof to preach, to the People, but take upon them to do it of their own Heads, being much conceited of their own Parts and Abilities that Way, and thinking it beneath them to sit as Auditors, when they conceive themselves so much wiser than their Teachers, and so much better able to instruct People in Matters of Religion than they are.

Now to the first of these; *viz.* such as pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, but yet do not offer to give any Proof of their being inspir'd, I shall have no Regard at all in my following Discourse; because the best and readiest Way to avoid being deluded by such Men, is to give no Ear at all to them.

And this is also what we ought in Prudence, and what we are bound in Duty to do; for what good Reason have we to believe any Man to be divinely inspired only upon his own saying so?

Nay indeed tho' it should be true that such an one is inspired, yet unless he can make Proof of it to us, better Proof than any Man's own Testimony is in his own behalf, we have no Reason to believe him. We do wisely therefore in not believing him; for should we believe him to be inspir'd only for his own saying so, we must, for the same Reason, believe every other Person to be inspir'd who pretends the same. It is plain therefore that we can never be secure against Imposture, if we ever consent to take any Man's own Word that he is inspir'd, for a Proof that he is so.

Even our *Saviour* himself desir'd not, much less did he claim to be believed upon these Terms; nay he grants that he ought not to have been believ'd, if he had not produc'd better Proof and Evidence of his divine Mission and Inspiration than his own Testimony only; *John v. 31. If I bear Witness of my self, says he, my Witness is not true; i. e.* it is not sufficiently

ently credible; for true it might be, and without doubt it was. But yet he grants, that if he had given no other Proof of his divine Mission, but only his own bare Testimony, Men would not have had sufficient Reason to believe that; and therefore for the farther Proof of his Authority, he appeals sometimes to the Testimony of the antient Prophets, all whose Predictions of the *Messias* were punctually fulfill'd in him, at the thirty ninth Verse of that Chapter, *Search the Scriptures; for they are they which testify of me*: Sometimes to the Witness of *John the Baptist*, whom all the People took for a *Prophet*, at the thirty third Verse of that Chapter, *Ye sent unto John, and he bare Witness unto the Truth*; and above all, and most frequently, to the Witness of God himself, which was given to him by the miraculous Powers wherewith he was endued, at the thirty sixth Verse of that Chapter; *the Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear Witness of me that the Father hath sent me*. And again, chap. x. ver. 37, 38. *If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the Works*.

We need therefore never trouble our selves to examine the Doctrine of those who come to us, pretending that they have a Revelation from God, unless they are able to give such Proof of their divine Mission and Inspiration as our *Saviour* did. To all others we have a short Answer to give, and it is such an one as they can make no satisfactory Reply to, namely this. If what you teach me be no other Doctrine than is already clearly taught in the divinely inspir'd Books of holy Scripture, what need you pretend a special Revelation for it? Shew us but only that your Doctrine is taught in Scripture, and we shall readily believe it upon the Credit of Scripture, though we do not believe you to be divinely inspir'd; but if your Doctrine be different from that which is taught in Scripture, then indeed you do wisely to pretend to Revelation and Inspiration, because nothing else can be a sufficient Warrant to you to teach any such Doctrine: Only this we have still to say; that God never yet sent any Prophet into the World with a new Revelation, but he enabled him to give good Proof to the World, that he was inspir'd and sent by God. This therefore is what we demand of you; give Proof of your divine Mission; do the Works of God that we may know that you are sent by God: And when we shall see you work Miracles, it will be Time enough then to examine what your Doctrine is; and if upon Examination we shall find that it is a Doctrine worthy of God, and such a Doctrine as Miracles can give Proof to, we shall not be backward to own your Mission, and embrace your Doctrine. But in the mean Time we think it not fit, nor worth while to give any Ear or Regard to you at all, nor to give our selves any Trouble to hear either what your Doctrines are, or why you teach them; for any one may pretend to Inspiration as well as you; and any one's Pretence to it will be as credible as yours, if you give no other Proof of it than he does, and no other Proof do you offer at: You only say that you are inspir'd, and so does he; you only say you are sent from God, and so says he; so have said a great many in all Ages, who yet have not agreed with you as to Doctrine. Either therefore we must believe every Pretender to Revelation, or else we cannot reasonably believe you; either we must receive every Impostor, who says he is sent from God, or else we cannot receive you, till *the Signs of an Apostleship*, or divine Mission, are wrought in you; which, as *St. Paul* says, speaking of himself, *2 Cor. xii. 12. are Signs, and Wonders, and mighty Deeds*.

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And secondly, as to the last Sort of the Prophets or Teachers before-mentioned, *viz.* those which do not pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, neither are commissioned and authorised by the standing Governors of the Church, the Bishops and supreme Pastors thereof, to preach to the People, but take upon them to do it of their own Heads, being only conceited of their own Parts and Abilities that Way, and thinking it beneath them to sit as Auditors, when they are, in their own Opinion, so much wiser than their Teachers, and so much better able to instruct the People in Matters of Religion, than they are; to these, I say, I shall likewise have no Regard at all in my following Discourse; because these also, it may well be taken for granted, are Deceivers and Impostors, without making any Tryal of them, without examining them by their Fruits, seeing they have not so much as the Sheep's Cloathing upon them; so that if we are deceived by them, it must be because we are willing to be deceiv'd. For of the Preachers of the Gospel St. Paul says, *Rom. x. 15. How shall they preach, except they be sent?* And these Men are so far from being sent by God, that they do not so much as pretend to be sent by him. For there are but two Ways of God's sending Men to preach, *viz.* either by an ordinary or by an extraordinary Mission: And his ordinary Mission is of those who are ordain'd to this Office by the Governors of the Church; such as in the *Jewish Church* were the *Scribes*, of whom therefore our Saviour says, that they did *sit in Moses's Seat*, Matth. xxiii. 2. such as in the *Christian Church* are the *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, who derive their Ordination in Succession from the *Apostles*, and may therefore be said to *sit in their Seat*: And his extraordinary Mission is of those whom he himself appoints to the Office by special Revelation, as he did *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and our Saviour and his *Apostles*; and these I noted before, he always impowers to make sufficient Proof of their Mission and Inspiration, by Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds.

Those therefore, whom I am now speaking of, having neither of these Missions, have plainly no Mission at all; and we need never trouble our selves to examine the Doctrine of those who take upon them to teach without any Warrant or Commission so to do: For they ought not to teach, not being sent; and unless they can shew that they are sent, we ought not to give Ear to them. They, in presuming to teach, usurp an Office, which they have no Right to; and we, if we hearken to them, are guilty of almost as great a Fault, in allowing and encouraging their Usurpation.

Having therefore, by what has been already said, excluded two of the four Sorts of Prophets or Teachers before-mentioned; *viz.* those who pretend to Inspiration, but can give no Proof thereof; and those who take upon them to preach without being sent; there are only the two other Sorts remaining, to whom in my following Discourse it will be necessary to have any Respect, *viz.* 1. Such as do, or at least seem to do Miracles, for Proof, that they are extraordinarily inspir'd and commissioned by God to instruct the People in Matters of Religion. And, 2. Such as are appointed and ordained to preach the Gospel, by the Bishops and Governors of the Church, to whom the Care of chusing and appointing fit Persons for this Office is ordinarily committed: For even among these there may be some *false Prophets*, whom therefore it is our Duty to beware of.

1. I say there may be some such, even among those who do, or which is all one to us, seem to do Miracles, for Proof that they are extraordinarily inspired and commissioned by God, to instruct the People in Matters of Religion.

For thus, under the Law, he was certainly a *false Prophet*, or Teacher, who persuaded Men to Idolatry; and yet that some, who would do that, would also do, or seem to do, some wonderful Works to gain themselves Credit, is clearly intimated by *Moses* in *Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3. If there arise among you a Prophet, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder*

cometh to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken to the Words of that Prophet, &c. Here was a false Prophet, and yet he did, or at least did seem to work Miracles.

And the like, we are foretold, would happen in the Christian Church, Matth. xxiv. 24. *There shall arise, says our Saviour, false Christs, and false Prophets, and shall shew great Signs and Wonders, insomuch that if possible, they shall deceive the very elect.* And the Apostle St. Paul speaking of the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, (a false Prophet therefore, without Doubt, he was) yet says of him, 2 Thes. ii. 9. that his Coming is after the Working of Satan, with all Powers, and Signs, and lying Wonders. And,

2. There may also be some false Prophets among those who receive Commission from the Church, to exercise the Office of Teachers.

For the Bishops and Governors of the Church are but Men, and so can judge only by outward Appearance, and by the open Profession which Men make, of the inward Qualifications of those whom they ordain to be Elders and Teachers in the Church.

And besides, they who are orthodox when they are ordain'd, may afterwards depart from the Truth, and may possibly vent their pernicious Errors among the People for some While, before the Governors of the Church, be they ever so watchful, can observe it, and put them to Silence.

Or farther, it may be, that the Governors of the Church themselves may not be always so watchful, or so careful in this Matter, as they should be. By these Means therefore, I say, it may happen, that there may be sometimes false Teachers, even among those who are lawfully ordained to be Teachers.

Thus it was in the Jewish Church, in our Saviour's Time; the Scribes and Pharisees did sit in Moses's Seat, i. e. they were lawfully authorised and commissioned to explain and interpret the Law to the People, and in the general they did it well enough, as our Saviour himself bears them Witness, Matth. xii. 2, 3. *The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses's Seat; all therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do;* for our Saviour, most certainly, would not have directed the People, in the general, to follow their Advice; *all that they bid you observe, that observe and do;* but that he knew, that the Doctrine of most of them was in the Main true and good, well grounded upon, or agreeable to the Law. But then, as our Saviour himself also observes, there were some Exceptions to this; and therefore in other Places he calls some of them blind Guides, and charges them with having made void the Law of God through their own Traditions, which they had received to hold.

And that the same would also happen in the Christian Church was foretold by St. Paul, Acts xx. 30. where, directing his Discourse to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, whom the Holy Ghost had made Overseers, or Bishops of the Flock, as he had said at the twenty eighth Verse, i. e. who had by the Apostles themselves, directed by the Holy Ghost, been ordained to that Office; he says, that even of their own selves, some Men should arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away Disciples after them.

There being therefore no absolute Security, that we should not be deceived and misled, even by those whom we have the greatest Reason to give Credit to, viz. those who are our lawful Guides and Teachers, or those, who seem to give sufficient Proof of an extraordinary divine Inspiration; forasmuch as even among these there may be some Seducers or false Prophets; it is Time now that I proceed to that which I before told you would be my chief Business in discoursing on these Words: viz. To explain the Rule here given us, by our Saviour, for the discovering who are false Prophets, in Order to

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our being aware of them: *Beware of false Prophets,—Ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

And here it will lie upon me,

I. To enquire, what are those *Fruits* by which false Prophets may be known from true ones; and,

II. To shew how the Rule here given is to be used and applied; or how we are to make a Judgment of them *by their Fruits.*

I. I am to enquire what are those *Fruits* by which *false Prophets* may be known from true ones.

And by the *Fruits* of *false Prophets*, by which they may be known to be false Prophets, some understand, the *Manner of their Life and Conversation*; others, *their Doctrines*, or rather the *Fruits* of their *Doctrines*, *i. e.* those Practices which their *Doctrines* have a natural Tendency to promote and encourage.

1. I say, some, by those *Fruits* of false Prophets here spoken of, by which they may be known to be false Prophets, understand the *Manner of their Life and Conversation*; as if our *Saviour* had meant to give it as a Rule to us, to reject as false those *Doctrines*, which are preached and pressed upon us by such as are of impure and vicious Lives; and on the other Side, to receive as true those *Doctrines*, which are preached and pressed upon us by such as are of blameless Life and Conversation.

But that this was not our *Saviour's* Meaning, a few Words will suffice to shew.

For even *Judas* himself, (and no Preacher hardly can be supposed to be a worse Man than he was) when he was sent forth by our *Saviour* with the other Apostles to preach, did, without all doubt, preach the same good and sound *Doctrine* which they did; he was not therefore a false Prophet, altho' guilty in his own Practice, of the greatest Crimes.

And there can be, I think, as little doubt made, but that those Persons, spoken of at the twenty second Verse of this Chapter, were true Prophets, and, as to their *Doctrine*, good Teachers, who even in the Day of Judgment shall challenge, and claim, as if it were their Due, from *Christ* some Reward for the good Service they have done him, in preaching his Gospel to the World; *many*, says he, *will say unto me in that Day, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name cast out Devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?* The Persons there spoken of seem to have been, not only Teachers of the Truth, but Teachers of the first Rank, such as had received the Knowledge of those Truths which they taught, by special Revelation, and had given good Evidence to the World of their divine Mission, and consequently of the Truth of their *Doctrine*, by Miracles; by *casting out Devils*, and *doing many wonderful Works*: And yet they were far enough from being good Men; for of them our *Saviour* says in the next Verse, *then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work Iniquity.* Where you may observe, that it is not charg'd upon them, that they preached without being sent, or that they preached Lies, or that they had not really done those Miracles which they had seemed to do; but only that their own Life had not been answerable to their Preaching.

And so likewise that the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* in our *Saviour's* Time were in the main good Teachers, I have observed already; for our *Saviour* himself commands the People to follow their Directions, *Matth. xxiii. 3.* *All whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do*; but that they were not good Livers, he expressly notes in the next Words; *but do not ye after their Works, for they say and do not. For they bind heavy*

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Burthens and grievous to be born, and lay them on Men's Shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their Fingers.

From whence therefore, by the Way, we may observe, that it is no just Cause of withdrawing our selves from the Communion of the established Church to which we belong; that there are perhaps some in it, lawfully admitted to exercise the ministerial Calling, whose Lives are not so exemplary and unexceptionable as they should be: Nay, though it should be any Man's Lot to be placed under the Ministry of a Person, who gives some Scandal to his Flock by his way of Living; yet this would not be a just Cause for that Man to reject his Ministry, or to separate himself from his Communion. For still, if he be lawfully called and admitted to the Ministry, he is a lawful Minister; and if the Doctrine of the Church which sent him be orthodox, and his preaching be agreeable to the Doctrine of the Church and of the Scripture, he is a good Preacher, and a true Prophet; and as such his Advice is to be hearkned to, and his Directions to be obeyed. *Whatsoever they shall bid you observe, that observe and do,* says our Saviour, *but do not after their Works, for they say and do not.*

Not that I would be thought to excuse or apologise for a scandalous Ministry; I say on the contrary, that it is great Pity that any wicked Person should be admitted to so sacred an Office; and great Pity it is, that, when he is found out, he should not then be rejected from it; but all the Watchfulness of Church-Governors, and the greatest Strictness of Church-Discipline, have never yet been sufficient wholly to prevent this Evil, nor probably ever will be: So that we may apply to this Case those Words of our Saviour, *Luke xvii. 1. It is impossible but that Offences will come,* nevertheless, *woe unto him thro' whom they come.*

But all that I say is this, that the personal Wickedness of any Man who is lawfully called to the Ministry, and employed therein, does not render his Ministry ineffectual; nor, if his Teaching be sound and orthodox, is his own contrary Way of Living a good Reason to reject his Teaching, or an Excuse for not observing and obeying his good Directions. A vitious Person should not indeed be admitted to the Ministry; that is readily granted; and if being in the Ministry, and admonished to amend his Life, he neglects to do it, there is no Question but that he ought to be removed from it, as soon as may be, in a lawful Way: But this is properly the Care of Church-Governors, not of the People; and every regular Proceeding of this Nature must be a Work of Deliberation and Time. If therefore this be not done, and till this can be done, I say that the Offence which he gives by his Life, is not a reasonable Ground to the People of separating from his Communion; for still he is a Pastor, if lawfully called; still he is their Pastor, till lawfully removed. And though it be an Objection to him as a Man, and much more as a Minister, that his Life is not answerable to his Preaching, yet this is no Objection to the Truth of his Doctrine: Nay, rather it may be thought a probable Argument that it is true, and that he himself believes it to be so; for what else but the Force and Power of Truth could ever make a Man preach so constantly as he does against himself? It is no Objection therefore to his Ministry that he lives not as he preaches; but it would be an unanswerable Objection to it, if he should preach as he lives. That he lives not as he preaches, is therefore a good Reason why the People should not follow his Example; but it is not a good Reason why they should not regard his Preaching; for he may be a very bad Man, and yet not a false Prophet.

And, on the other Side, it has been observed, that some Hereticks have been Men of unblameable Lives; nay this (as I have formerly observed) was certainly one Thing meant by that *Sheep's Cloathing*, wherewith these

ravening Wolves are commonly covered; *they come unto you in Sheep's Cloathing*; i. e. they often appear to be Men of the greatest Piety, the strictest Probity, and the warmest Zeal for Religion: The Shew of which gives them a Reputation, and makes the false Doctrines which they broach more readily received by the People.

And it matters not, as to this, whether or no they are really such as they appear to be; i. e. whether they have indeed as much Goodness, Piety and Zeal, as they make an outward Shew of. For the outward Shew and Appearance which Men make, is all that we can judge of them by; and we ought not in Charity to judge any Man to be worse than he appears to be. So that if a false Prophet may be, as to his outward Conversation, blameless and unproveable, it is all one to us, as if he were indeed as good a Man as we think him to be; and therefore the Manner of a Man's Life, and Conversation can by no means be a sure Mark whereby to judge, whether he be a false Prophet or no; and consequently this could not be what our Saviour here meant by those *Fruits* by which we may know *false Prophets*; for by their *Fruits*, which he gives as a Mark or Sign by which we may know them, he certainly meant somewhat which was easily to be seen and discerned, else it could not be a Mark; but whether a Man be a good Man or no, or whether he be really as good as he outwardly appears to be, is what can be known by none but God, the *Searcher of Hearts*.

Forasmuch therefore as there are, or may be, some who do *hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*, i. e. who are orthodox in their Belief and Profession, and yet very wicked in their Lives; and others, on the other Side, who though they have embraced very gross and hurtful Errors, may not see the true Consequences of their own Opinions, and so may not have their Manners corrupted thereby; or who, if they do indeed secretly allow themselves in those Sins which their erroneous Doctrines do give Countenance to, yet, as to their outward Conversation, which is all we can judge by, cannot be charged with any Crime; it is evident, that the Life and Conversation of a Man is no sure Mark by which to know whether he be a *true* or *false Prophet*; and consequently that this was not the Thing meant by our Saviour in these Words, *by their Fruits ye shall know them*. It remains therefore in the second Place,

2. That by the *Fruits* here spoken of we must understand their *Doctrines*, or rather, the *Fruits* of their *Doctrines*; i. e. those Practices which their Doctrines have a natural Tendency to promote and encourage.

And this is indeed a very good Mark, by which to distinguish between true and false Doctrines; and consequently between true and false Prophets. For it is an easy matter for a Man who has the Use of his Reason, and will allow himself any Time to consider Things, to discern what are the natural Consequences of any Doctrine; what Influence it is likely to have upon those who believe it; what Sort of a Life and Conversation they must lead, who live and act according to the true Consequences of such an Opinion: And when this is known, it is no less easy then, by those natural Notions which we have of Good and Evil, to judge, whether the Practice which is promoted and encouraged by such an Opinion be good or bad. For however in Matters of Opinion Men are very much divided, in Matters of Practice they are generally well enough agreed in their Judgments. There is in most Matters of Practice a common Consent of Mankind, either allowing, approving and commending them; or else disallowing, blaming, and condemning them. Those Doctrines or Opinions therefore, which tend to encourage Men in the Practice of such Things, as are allow'd by all to be good and virtuous, may reasonably be presumed to be true

Doctrines; because *a corrupt Tree cannot bring forth good Fruit*; and the Teacher of such Doctrines, and of none but such, may be presumed to be a true Prophet. And, on the the other Side, those Doctrines or Opinions which tend to encourage Men in the Practice of any Thing which is disallowed, and condemned by natural Reason as sinful and vitious, may be certainly concluded to be false Doctrines; for a *good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit*; and the Teacher of any such Doctrine may be known to be, at least as to that Doctrine, a *false Prophet*. This I take to be the Meaning of the Rule here given us by our *Saviour*; *ye shall know them by their Fruits*.

I should now proceed to shew, how this Rule is to be used and applied; or how we are to make a Judgment of *false Prophets by their Fruits*. But the speaking to this Point will be Matter enough for another Discourse.



DISCOURSE LXXXIII.

The Way of discerning false Prophets.

MATT. VII. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Ye shall know them by their Fruits. Do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles?

Even so every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit, but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit.

A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit, neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.

Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down, and cast into the Fire.

Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.



OUR Saviour in the Verse foregoing had caution'd us to beware of false Prophets, and here he gives us a Mark by which we may discern who are such; beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves; and then it follows, as in the Words I have before read to you; ye shall know them by their Fruits, &c.

On which Words I have already begun a Discourse, in which I told you it would be my chief Business to explain to you this Rule for the Trial of false Prophets; by their Fruits ye shall know them; and to shew how we are to use and apply it.

But before I come to do this, and in order to the bringing what I had to say into the narrower Compass, I thought it fit to observe again, (tho' I had noted it before in a former Discourse) that of Prophets, of Teachers, of such as take upon them to instruct Men in the Mind and Will of God, there may be reckoned four Sorts.

1. Such as pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, but yet do not offer to give any Proof of their being so inspired.

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2. Such

2. Such as pretending to immediate divine Inspiration, do also seem to give such Proof of their being divinely inspired, as the ancient *Prophets*, and as our *Lord* and his *Apostles* did, *i. e.* who either do, or at least seem to do, miraculous Works.

3. Such as teach by Virtue of an ordinary and standing Commission granted by God to the Bishops and Governors of his Church, to chuse out, appoint, and ordain fit Persons, to instruct the People in Matters of Religion. And,

4. Lastly ; Such as neither pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, nor yet are commissioned and authorised by the Governors of the Church, the Bishops and supreme Pastors thereof, to preach to the People ; but take upon them to do it of their own Heads, fondly conceiving themselves to have an excellent Talent that Way.

Now as to the first of these, *viz.* those who pretend to immediate divine Inspiration, but yet do not offer to give any Proof of their being divinely inspired ; I told you I would have no Regard to them in my following Discourse ; because the best and the readiest Way to avoid being deluded by such Men, is to give no Ear at all to them ; and this is also what we ought in Prudence, and are bound in Duty, to do. For what Reason have we to believe any Man to be divinely inspir'd, only upon own his saying so ? We can never be secure against Imposture, if we ever consent to take any Man's own Word, that he is inspired, for a Proof that he is so.

And as to the last Sort of Prophets, or Teachers, before mentioned, *viz.* such as take upon them to preach only of their own Heads, and out of a fond Conceit that they have a Talent that Way, without any Warrant from God, or the Governors of his Church, so to do : I likewise said, that I would have no Regard at all to them in my following Discourse, because these also, it may be taken for granted, are Deceivers and Impostors, seeing they have not so much as the Sheep's Cloathing upon them ; for of the Preachers of the Gospel, St. Paul says, *Rom. x. 15. How shall they preach except they be sent ?* And these are so far from being sent by God, that they do not so much as pretend to be sent by him. They therefore in presuming to teach, usurp an Office which they have no Right to ; and we, if we hearken to them, are guilty of almost as great a Fault, in allowing and encouraging their Usurpation.

Having therefore excluded these two Sorts of Prophets from any Place in this Discourse, *viz.* Those who pretend to Inspiration, but can give no Proof thereof ; and those who take upon them to preach without being sent ; there are, as I told you, only the two other Sorts remaining, to whom in my Discourse on these Words, it would be necessary to have any Respect, *viz.* Those who do, or seem to do Miracles, for Proof of an extraordinary Mission, and those who are sent in the ordinary Way, by regular Ordination and Appointment of the Governors of the Church ; for even among these, as I then shewed, there may be some false Prophets ; and it is both our Duty, and our greatest Interest, to discern who are such, that we may not be misled by them.

Which, that we might be able to do, I then proceeded to what I told you would be my main Business in discoursing on these Words, *viz.*

I. To enquire what are those *Fruits* by which *false Prophets* may be known ; by their *Fruits* ye shall know them. And,

II. To shew, how this Rule for the discerning of false Prophets is to be used and applied.

I. To enquire, what are those Fruits by which *false Prophets* may be known; *by their Fruits ye shall know them.*

And by *their Fruits* I know not what else we can understand, but either the Manner of their Life and Conversation; or else the Fruits of their Doctrines, *i. e.* those Practices which their Doctrines have a natural Tendency to promote and encourage.

Having therefore in my former Discourse proved at large by several Instances, that by those Fruits by which we may know who are false Prophets, cannot be meant the Manner of their Life and Conversation; it remains that by the *Fruits* here spoken of, we understand their Doctrines, or rather the Fruits of their Doctrines, *i. e.* those Practices which their Doctrines have a natural Tendency to promote and encourage. And this is indeed a very good Mark by which to distinguish between true and false Doctrines, and consequently between true and false Prophets. For it is an easy Matter for a Man who has the Use of his Reason, and will allow himself any Time to consider Things, to discern what are the natural Consequences of any Doctrine; what Influence it is likely to have upon those who believe it; what Sort of a Life and Conversation they must lead, who live and act according to the true Consequences of such an Opinion: And when this is known, it is no less easy then, by those natural Notions which we have of Good and Evil, to make a Judgment, whether the Practice which is promoted and encourag'd by such an Opinion be good or bad. Those Doctrines or Opinions therefore, which tend to encourage Men in the Practice of such Things, as are allowed by all to be good and virtuous, may reasonably be presum'd to be true Doctrines; because *a corrupt Tree cannot bring forth good Fruit*; and the Teacher of such Doctrines, and of none but such, may be presum'd to be a true Prophet. And, on the other side, those Doctrines or Opinions which tend to encourage Men in the Practice of any Thing which is disallow'd and condemn'd by natural Reason as sinful and vitious; may be certainly concluded to be false Doctrines; for *a good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit*; and the Teacher of any such Doctrine may be known to be, at least as to that Doctrine, a *false Prophet*. This I take to be the Meaning of the Rule here given us by our *Saviour*, for the discerning of false Prophets; *ye shall know them by their Fruits, i. e.* you may certainly conclude that their Doctrines are false, and that they are false Prophets, in case their Doctrines are such as do give any Allowance or Encouragement to any Wickedness or Immorality in Practice.

And in order to beware of false Prophets, and that we may be secur'd against the Seduction of those who are such, it is our Duty to try and examine by this Rule the Doctrines which are preach'd to us, even by those who are our lawful Guides and Pastors; nay, and even by those too (if any such there be) who pretend to teach by immediate Revelation, and special Command and Commission from God; and seem also to make good their Pretensions by doing such Works as appear to us to be miraculous. For we cannot be secure from Error and Seduction, if we take upon Trust and without Examination, every Doctrine which is taught us even by such Guides as these, whom yet, of all others, we have the greatest Reason to give an implicit Credit to.

This therefore was the second Thing propos'd, *viz.*

II. To shew, how the Rule here given us by our *Saviour* is to be us'd and apply'd, in order to the discerning who are true and who are false Prophets. *By their Fruits ye shall know them.*

And the Way to examine the Doctrines of our Teachers by this Rule, and thereby to judge whether they be true or false Prophets, is this.

1. In case we had no standing Revelation of God's Will, (which was indeed the Case before the first publick Revelation thereof was made by *Moses*;) the Way, according to this Rule, to make a Judgment, whether a Man were a true or a false Prophet, would be this. We had been to consider whether the Doctrine which he taught, and which, he said, he had Commission from God to teach, was agreeable to those Notions of Good and Evil, which had been clearly taught us by the Light of Reason only; and if all the Doctrines which he had propos'd to us had been such as tended to the Honour and Glory of God, and to the Preservation of Peace and Justice among Men, we might then have reasonably presum'd that he had indeed such a Commission from God as he pretended to have. And if, besides, he had given farther Evidence of his Inspiration by doing Miracles, we might then have safely concluded that he was indeed a Teacher sent from God; according to the Rule laid down by our *Saviour*, which carries its own Reason with it; *John* vii. 18. *He that seeketh his Glory that sent him, the same is true, and no Unrighteousness is in him.* But, on the contrary, if the Doctrines which he had taught, had, in themselves, or in their plain Consequences, tended to withdraw Men from the Worship of the true God, to the Worship of Idols; or to establish such a Worship of God, as was manifestly disagreeable to his Nature; or to encourage or promote the Practice of any moral Evil, as Theft, Murther, Fornication, Lying, Perjury, or the like; in any of these Cases we must have concluded that the Man who had taught such Doctrines was a false Prophet, even tho' he had done, or had seem'd to do Miracles for a Proof of his divine Mission; according to the Rule given by *Moses*, which I have already had Occasion to cite, in *Deut.* xiii. 3. *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder; and the Sign or Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other Gods, and let us serve them: Thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams, &c.* The Reason of which Rule, and such a Reason it is as will always hold good, is this; because it is inconsistent with the Nature of God to command or encourage any Practice which is morally evil. God can no more do this than he can deny himself; so that whatever Signs or Proofs any Man gives of Inspiration, it is absolutely and utterly incredible, that that Doctrine should be from God, which commands or establishes the Practice of any Thing, which is manifestly impious and wicked.

Thus, I say, even they to whom the first Revelation of all was sent, might by the *Fruits* of those Doctrines, which were preach'd to them by the first Prophets, make a true Judgment whether the Persons who taught them were true or false Prophets. But,

2. We, who have already a standing Revelation of God's Will in the holy Scripture, have an easier and shorter Way of using and applying the Rule which is here given us by our *Saviour* for the discerning who are false Prophets; by *their Fruits ye shall know them.*

For the antient *Prophets* of the *Old Testament*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, the Preachers of that Gospel which is contained in the *New*, being allow'd to be true Prophets, both because they gave abundant Proof by Miracles of their divine Mission, and because their Doctrine was in every Point according to *Godliness*, as the *Apostle* speaks, *1 Tim.* vi. 6. We have now, not only the Dictates of natural Reason, but likewise the *lively Oracles* of God, whereby to try and examine the Doctrines which are propos'd to us.

So that now, if there be any Doctrine preach'd to us, whether by those who by lawful Ordination and Appointment are constituted Guides and Pastors

stors in the *Christian Church*; or by such as pretend to have a new Revelation, and seem also to make good their Pretence to it by such Works as appear to us to be miraculous; in case the Doctrine which they teach be in any Point contradictory either to the clear Dictates of natural Reason, or to that standing Revelation of God's Will which we have in the holy Scriptures; if in itself, or in its true and necessary Consequences, it be dishonourable to God, and tends to beget in Men's Minds mean and unworthy Thoughts of God, or to lessen their Reverence or Love towards him; or if in itself, or in its true and necessary Consequences, it tends to make void any Law of God, to render a good Life unnecessary, or to allow or encourage Men in the Practice of any Thing which God has clearly forbidden, either by the natural Law of Reason, or by the exprefs Words of Scripture; we may confidently conclude, that such a Doctrine, by whomsoever it be taught, is a false Doctrine; for by its *Fruits* we may know it to be such, and therefore as such it is our Duty to reject it. *Beware of false Prophets—ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

But tho' upon such a Trial as this we may certainly conclude, that the Doctrine itself is false, which is so manifestly contrary to Reason or Scripture in the Practices which it leads to; yet we cannot from hence alone conclude with the like Confidence, that the Man who has taught any such Doctrine, is, properly speaking, a *false Prophet*; such a false Prophet, I mean, as we ought forthwith to reject as such, and to have nothing more to do with. But we must go a Step farther, before we can draw that Conclusion; there is another Thing to be first enquired into; namely, what Warrant or Commission the Man has, or pretends to have, to be a Preacher or Teacher; whether the Mission that he pretends to, be extraordinary, by special divine Inspiration, or ordinary, by lawful and regular Ordination and Appointment, from those to whom God has committed the Care and Government of his Church. For,

1. If the Person who teaches any such wicked Doctrine, any Doctrine I mean which in its just Consequences leads to Wickedness, pretends to have it by Revelation, and pleads no other Warrant or Authority to be a Preacher, either of that Doctrine or of any other, but only the Pretence which he makes to immediate divine Inspiration; in this Case we ought not only to reject that particular Doctrine as false, the Falseness of which we have already discover'd by the right Use and Application of the Rule which is here given us; *by their Fruits ye shall know them*; but it is our Duty also to reject the Man himself as a *false Prophet*, and never more to have any Thing to do with him. And the Reason of this is plain, namely, because his only Authority to teach, is, as is now suppos'd, grounded upon his Pretence to Revelation; and therefore that Pretence being sufficiently disprov'd, by his being found out to have taught, as by Inspiration, one Doctrine which is manifestly false, he has plainly no Shew of any Authority to teach remaining to him; and if he has no Authority to teach, then we have no Reason to hearken to him; and if we nevertheless still continue to hearken to him, after we have found him out to be an Impostor, we shall do it at our own Peril; and if we are deceiv'd by him, we shall have none to blame but our selves. But,

2. The Case is somewhat different, in case the Person who has been found to have taught any one such Doctrine, be our lawful Guide and Pastor; *i. e.* if he be lawfully ordain'd and appointed to that Office by the Governors of the Church; and does not pretend to an infallible Spirit, but only to such Skill and Knowledge in Matters of Religion, as may be attain'd by Reading and Study; and is most likely to be best attain'd by such Men as give themselves wholly to this Work; and which, we have Reason to think, is attain'd, at least in sufficient Measure, by those whom the Bishops and Governors of the Church,

Church, the most competent Judges in this Matter, have thought fit to lay their Hands upon, and ordain to this Employment. For that such as these should be sometimes mistaken, is no Marvel; and mistaken they may be in some Things, and yet not be Deceivers or false Prophets; for they themselves do not pretend to Infallibility; and the Governors of the Church, by whom they are sent, do not send them as infallible Teachers, as Persons not subject to Error, as Persons whose Doctrine the People ought to receive with a Sort of an implicit Faith, without any Trial or Examination thereof: But all that they testify of them, when they ordain them, and admit them to the Cure of Souls, is only that by the best Trial they could make of them, they found them orthodox in their Opinions, and apt to teach.

If therefore, I say, any such Person has hapned in his Teaching, to let fall any Expression, which upon good Examination we have found not agreeable to right Reason, or to the plain Sense of Scripture, or to the Analogy of Faith; our own Knowledge that that Doctrine in particular is a false Doctrine, is a very good Reason why we should not receive or believe it, tho' it be taught us by one who is lawfully authoris'd to be our Guide. But then I say, that this alone is not a sufficient Reason why we should reject him from being our Guide, or why we should not believe and obey him in other Points of Doctrine, which are, or appear to be, well grounded upon Reason or Scripture. For tho', as a Man, he might be mistaken in some Things, yet, as being approv'd by the Governors of the Church, we have Reason to believe him to be in the main sound and orthodox; and as being authoris'd to be our Guide, we have Reason to submit to his Judgment, and to follow his Directions in other Points, in which we have no just Cause to think he is mistaken; according to that general Direction which is given us, in *Heb. xiii. 17. Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves; for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give an Account, that they may do it with Joy, and not with Grief.*

And thus our Saviour himself determines this very Case, with respect to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were the authoris'd Guides and Teachers of the People among the Jews. He frequently in his preaching took notice of their Ignorance and Mistakes in some Things; how that in some Instances they did *teach for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and in other Instances had expounded the Law of Moses, of which they were the Interpreters, in a wrong Sense, in such a Sense as did in effect make void that Law which they pretended to expound: A notable Instance of which we have, *Matth. xv. 5.* in that Exposition which they gave of the fifth Commandment. Now these were very grievous Mistakes; and therefore our Saviour thought it necessary, not only to note some particular Instances of this Kind, but likewise to give a general Caution to the People, not to depend too much upon their Judgment, not to receive all their Doctrines without Examination; but to make use of their own Eyes to see their own Way, and to take Care that they were not misled by these (as he sometimes calls them) *blind Guides*. *Beware, says he, of the Scribes, Mark xii. 38. and, beware of the Doctrine of the Pharisees, Matth. xvi. 11.*

And yet nevertheless, because the Doctrine of these Scribes and Pharisees was in the main true and orthodox; and especially because they did *sit in Moses's Seat, i. e.* were lawfully authoris'd and commission'd to instruct the People in the Law of Moses, our Saviour does not advise the People to reject their whole Doctrine for the sake of some Errors which were mix'd with it; or to reject them as false Prophets, and not fit to be heard in any Thing because they had been mistaken in some Things; or to set up a distinct Communion, and chuse new Pastors and Teachers for themselves; but on the contrary, he exhorts them to continue still under their Ministry, (at least till God

should give them other Pastors more according to his own Heart, Jer. iii. 15. and to pay such Deference to their Teaching, as it was fit the People should do to the Judgment of those, who might well be supposed to be better skilled in Matters of Religion than they themselves were; and especially of those, who for that Time were by the Providence of God, and a regular Mission and Ordination, appointed to be their Guides and Instructors, Matth. xxiii. 2, 3. *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's Seat; all therefore, says he, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.*

And what has been said is, I hope, sufficient to shew, both what are those Fruits by which false Prophets may be discerned, and also how we may thereby discern who are such. *Beware of false Prophets.—Ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

I shall only observe one Thing, as an Inference from the foregoing Discourse, and so conclude; namely this.

That as they are certainly false Prophets, who teach such Doctrines, as in themselves, or in their true and just Consequences are contrary to any Truth or Duty, which is clearly taught us, either by the Light of Reason, or by the Revelation of God's Will in the holy Scripture; so all they may very justly be suspected to be false Prophets and deceitful Workers; and consequently ought to be carefully avoided, or very warily dealt withal; who will not suffer their Doctrines to be examined, but would have them embraced and believed by their Hearers with a blind and implicit Faith; especially, if in order to the procuring such a blind Obedience to themselves, they endeavour to put out the Eye of Reason in their People, and to take away from them the Key of Knowledge, the holy Scripture.

And I suppose, I shall not need to tell you, who they are who do this. It is done, in great Measure, by some of our own Sectaries, especially by the Quakers, who make very light of the written Word of God, calling it a dead Letter, but pretend that all their own Preaching and Writing is by Inspiration, that all the Doctrines taught by them are the Dictates of the Spirit of God, even of that same Spirit, by which we believe the Apostles spake, and the holy Scriptures were inspired; so that consequently, if we will believe these wild Enthusiasts, all their Discourses and Books are of equal Authority with the Scripture, and the Truth of them ought no more to be questioned, than the Truths which are revealed in Scripture.

But this is done in the most open and scandalous Manner by the Guides of the Church of Rome, who, supposing the Determinations of their Church to be infallible, oblige all their People to believe, with an implicit Faith, as the Church believes; will not suffer any of her Doctrines to be examined by Reason; or allow, that the manifest Absurdity or Contradiction which they imply in them, is a just Objection against them. And that their People may not know, how very different the present Faith of their Church is from that which was once delivered to the Saints by Christ and his Apostles, they will not suffer them, so far as they can hinder it, to look into the Bible; and that they may, in the most effectual Manner, which they can, prevent their looking into it, they take care, in those Places where they have full Power, to keep it lock'd up from the People in a Language which they do not understand.

Such Dealings as this, tho' we could not prove Falshood in any one of their Doctrines, which yet may very easily be done in a great many of them, even by that very Mark by which our Saviour here directs us to judge of false Doctrines, viz. by their Fruits, i. e. by the natural Tendency which they have to rob God of his Honour, to corrupt his Worship, to make void his Law, and to give Encouragement to Men in the Practice of such Things as he has clearly forbidden; but, I say, if this could not be prov'd, yet such

Dealing as we meet with in the Guides of the *Roman Church*, such Averseness to have their Doctrines try'd, and such Endeavours to keep People in Ignorance, would alone be sufficient to create in us a just Prejudice against them, and lay them open to a strong Suspicion of Falshood; for as our Saviour observes, *John iii. 20, 21. Every one that doeth evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doth Truth cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.*

It is not to be imagin'd therefore, but that if they knew or were persuaded that their Doctrines were such as would bear to be examin'd by Reason and Scripture, they would permit their People to use their Reason in the Examination of them, and encourage rather than forbid them to read the Scripture; that so by comparing their Doctrines with the Doctrine of Scripture, they might be more fully satisfied of the Truth of them. And therefore, since they will not do this, but endeavour all they can to keep their People from examining their Doctrines, and to breed them up in the grossest Ignorance, that so they may not be able to examine them; this affords a very strong Presumption, that even they themselves do not heartily believe the Truth of their own Doctrines, but only profess to hold them, and endeavour to persuade their People to believe them, because they bring, as indeed most of their Doctrines do, great Gain and Honour to the Priesthood: Which Thing alone affords likewise another very strong Presumption against them, according to those Words of our Saviour, *John vii. 18. He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own Glory.*

But we have not so learned Christ; we desire not to make a Gain of our People's Ignorance, or to have Dominion over their Faith. We think it enough to propose to our People those Doctrines which we believe to be well grounded upon, or agreeable to Reason, and Scripture; and then we leave it to them, nay we press them to it, to make use of their own Reason, and to search the Scriptures themselves, to see whether the Things which we say, are so or not.

By doing which, tho' we do not make so much Gain, nor procure so much Honour and blind Obedience to our selves as they do; we hope however, we shall be able to give a better Account of our Stewardship, and to gain more Souls to God.

And this we shall do, if, as you profess a purer Religion than they do, we can also persuade you to lead your Lives answerably to your holy Profession.

Which God grant we may all do, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, &c.



DISCOURSE LXXXIV.

The Insufficiency of Faith without Works.



MATTH. VII. 21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: But he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.



IF these Words are thought to have any Connection with, or Relation to the foregoing, they may be understood as assigning a Reason of that Rule which our *Saviour* had before given for the discerning false Prophets, *viz.* by the Fruits of their Doctrines; *by their Fruits*, says he, *ye shall know them.* *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, &c.* As if he had said, "This is therefore a good Rule, and an

"excellent Means of discovering a false Prophet; because the main Thing
"which God regards is Obedience to his pure and holy Laws, without which
"no Shew or Profession of Faith, or Piety, or Zeal for God, can recom-
"mend any Man to his Favour or Acceptance: Whoever therefore teaches
"any Doctrine, whereby Obedience to any Law of God is evacuated, may
"by that alone be certainly concluded to be a false Teacher, because his
"Doctrine is manifestly not agreeable to the Will of God; *for this is the*
"*Will of God, even your Sanctification.*

But there being no Particle, or other Note of Connexion, between these Words and the foregoing, I conceive it more reasonable to understand them in a more general Sense, *viz.* as declaring in general what are the Terms or Conditions required of all Men, whether Teachers or People, to make them capable of inheriting that eternal Life, which is promised and offer'd in the Gospel.

And the Occasion of our *Saviour's* uttering these Words, and likewise all that follow after to the End of his Sermon, which are all to the same Purpose, might probably be this. He might have observed, how attentively
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the People had listned to him in all the foregoing Sermon, what a good Liking they had shewed to his Doctrine, and how gladly they had seem'd to hear it: He might also know, that they had some Inclination to observe the Directions he had before given them; being convinc'd, by the Miracles which they had seen him work, that he was a *Teacher sent from God*. But he knew also, how much easier it is to approve good Rules of Life than to practise them; and consequently, that it was likely enough, that a great many of those, who were the most forward to list themselves his Disciples, would, when they had found, by their own making Trial, the Difficulty of observing some of those Rules which he had before prescrib'd, be ready to excuse themselves from such a heavy Burthen, and be apt to flatter themselves with Hopes, that tho' they should not be so very diligent as they might be, in the doing all those Duties which he had before laid upon them, he would, however, be so well pleas'd with their Willingness to hear, or their inward Approbation of his Doctrine, or their Forwardness to profess his holy Religion; or be so easily induc'd to pardon their Faults, upon their humbly owning them, and begging Forgiveness, that at the last they might gain Admittance into his heavenly Kingdom, tho' they had not been altogether such as they should have been. These probably he might know to be their inward Thoughts, and the Reasonings which they had within themselves: And therefore to prevent such a dangerous and fatal Mistake as this would have been, he might think it necessary, before he put an end to his Sermon, to declare, in the plainest Words, upon what Terms only they would be capable of attaining eternal Life. This therefore he does in the Text, in as plain Words, I think, as it was possible for him to express himself in; and in Words as full to the Purpose as any could be devis'd. For to prevent all Mistakes he expresses the very same Sense two several Ways; 1. Negatively; and, 2. Affirmatively.

1. Negatively, he declares, who and what they are, who, however they may conceit well of themselves, or be thought well of by others, shall yet have no Part or Portion in his Kingdom, *viz.* those who say, *i. e.* do nothing else but say unto him, *Lord, Lord. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

2. Positively, or Affirmatively, he declares, who and what they are, who and who only shall be admitted into it. *He that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

But though the Words are so clear in themselves, that their Meaning can hardly be misunderstood, yet it may not be amiss to spend a little Time in somewhat unfolding and expatiating upon the Sense which is contained in them; that so that great Truth, which we are here taught, may make the deeper and stronger Impression upon our Minds, and effectually engage us to strive to make our selves such, as the Promises of the Gospel do belong to.

And indeed this will be my chief Business in discoursing on these Words, *viz.* to fix your Thoughts and Meditations for a while upon this Subject; for of the Truth of the Doctrine which we are here taught, there can be no Doubt; nor consequently can it be needful to spend any Time in the Proof of it; it being taught us by him, who is appointed to give Judgment upon all Men at the last Day, either to Life or Death; and who therefore cannot be suppos'd ignorant of, or mistaken in, that Law or Rule, according to which he will then pass Judgment upon us. If he has told us, as he has in the Text, whom he will acquit, and whom he will condemn, in that Day, we need not enquire nor look any farther; for it is his Judgment by which we must stand or fall to all Eternity; and there is no Ground of Hope, that he will ever, out of Favour or Affection to any, transgress that Rule of Judgment

ment which he has already fix'd and establish'd by an everlasting and immutable Decree.

Our only Business will be, as it is indeed a Business of the greatest and most important Concern, which we have or ever can have, to endeavour to answer that Character which he here gives us of those, whom, and whom only, he will admit into his heavenly Kingdom.

Which that we may be the better enabled to do, I shall enquire,

I. Who are here meant by those who *say* unto Christ, Lord, Lord; but notwithstanding their so saying will be shut out from his Kingdom: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* And,

II. Who they are that *do* the Will of God, and to whom only the Promises of the Gospel belong; *he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

I. I shall enquire, who are here meant by such as *say* unto Christ, Lord, Lord, but notwithstanding their so saying will be excluded from his Kingdom: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* And,

i. By those who *say* unto Christ, Lord, Lord, we may understand all such as are *baptised* into his Name, and *make an open Profession* of his Faith and Religion. And taking the Words in this Sense, it is most certainly true, that *not every one that saith unto him Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

For first as to *Baptism*, tho' that be indeed necessary to admit us into the Covenant of Pardon and Reconciliation with God, because it is the Rite and Ceremony expressly appointed by Christ himself for this Purpose; so that consequently whoever neglects to be baptis'd, when he may, wilfully excludes himself from the Benefits of this Covenant, which are promis'd to none but those only who are baptised: Yet Baptism alone, consider'd only as an outward Rite or Ceremony, is not sufficient to restore us to God's Favour, or to wash away our Sins; it only serves to put us into a Capacity of being intitled to the Promises of the Gospel, upon our After-Performance of the Conditions to which the Promises are made, but it does not itself intitle us to them.

Baptism is no more to a *Christian*, than Circumcision was to a *Jew*; which, as it was a Ceremony, was only necessary because it was commanded, but had by Institution a special Significancy in it, to denote the Contract or Covenant which was then entred into between God and the Person circumcised. God, by putting that Sign in their Flesh, mark'd them out for his People, and did, as it were, declare, that if they continued faithful in his Service, the Blessing of *Abraham* their Father should come upon them: And they by receiving this Mark, as by his Direction and Appointment, took him for their God, and promis'd and vow'd all holy Obedience to his Laws, and particularly to those Laws which were given to them by *Moses*, as they were a peculiar People, and separate from all others. And therefore the *Apostle* says, *Gal. v. 3.* that *whoever was circumcised* was thereby made a *Debtor to keep the whole Law*. So that the Profit of Circumcision, even while the Law of Circumcision was in force, depended wholly upon their Performance of those Conditions which they thereby took upon themselves to perform: As the same *Apostle* says, *Rom. ii. 25.* *Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the Law; but if thou be a Breaker of the Law, thy Circumcision is made Uncircumcision.* And again, ver. 28, 29. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the Flesh:*

But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.

And of the like Benefit is Baptism to us *Christians*; it is a *Token of the Covenant* between God and us; and being by that Ceremony admitted into the *Christian Church*, we are thereby assur'd of God's Favour and Good-will towards us, so long as we continue in Covenant with him: But if we break the Covenant on our Part, God is no longer oblig'd to make good the Promises, which he, on his Part, has made to us. And therefore we may observe, that our Saviour in *Mark* xvi. 16. where he appoints this Rite of initiating Men into his Religion, when he comes to declare the Benefit thereof, mentions not only Baptism, but that also of which our Baptism is a Sign and Token, *viz.* our heartily embracing his Religion, and yielding Obedience thereto: For in that large Sense the Word, *Believe*, is every where us'd in the New Testament. *He that believeth*, says he, *and is baptised, shall be saved*; and then he adds, *but he that believeth not*, (whether he be baptis'd or not baptis'd it is all one, he that believeth not) *shall be damned*. And in like Manner St. Peter, in 1 *Epist.* iii. 2. where he attributes Salvation to Baptism, expressly distinguishes between the Sign or Ceremony, and the Thing signify'd; and declares that the former, without the latter, is of no Use or Advantage to us. For thus he writes; *the like Figure whereunto, Baptism, doth also now save us, not the putting away the Filth of the Flesh, but the Answer of a good Conscience towards God.*

And as Baptism, which is the Sign or Token of our Christian Profession, is of no Advantage to those who are not such as by the taking upon them that Mark or Badge they appear to be; so neither, secondly, is the *Profession* it self of the Christian Faith and Religion, without an inward and hearty Assent to the Truth of it, sufficient to recommend us to God's Acceptance, and to make us capable of his Promises. This indeed, following Baptism, may suffice to make us visible Members of *Christ's Church*: But *God seeth not as Man seeth*; for *Man looketh on the outward Appearance, but the Lord looketh on the Heart*. And therefore the *Apostle*, *Rom.* x. 9, 10. declaring in a few Words the Terms or Conditions of Salvation, expressly mentions an inward Belief as absolutely necessary, together with an outward Confession, in order thereto: *If*, says he, *thou shalt confess with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy Heart that God hath raised him from the Dead, thou shalt be saved*; for *with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation*. They who confess with their Mouth the *Lord Jesus*, may truly be reckon'd of the Number of those spoken of in the Text, who *say* unto him, *Lord, Lord*; but if they do nothing more, they are only Hypocrites: They may deceive Men, who can judge only by what they see and hear with their bodily Senses; but they cannot deceive God, who knows the Naughtiness and Falseness of their Hearts; and has expressly told us, that *the Hypocrite's Hope shall perish*, *Job* viii. 13. But farther,

2. By those who *say* unto *Christ*, *Lord, Lord*, and yet *shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*, we may understand those, who as they do outwardly profess the Christian Faith, so are likewise inwardly persuaded of the Truth of it, but yet do not live answerably to their Belief. For that a bare Belief of the Truths of the Gospel, without a good Life, is not the adequate Condition of our Justification and Salvation, is what we are clearly taught in several Places of holy Scripture; and especially by St. James, in the second Chapter of his Epistle; the latter half of which is spent wholly in the Declaration and Proof of this Point, *viz.* that *Faith without Works will not save us*. For such a Faith, he tells us, *ver.* 15. is a *dead Faith*, and

and so can be no more profitable to us, than good Words and Wishes only are to a Man who is ready to starve, and wants real Relief. *If a Brother or Sister be naked, and destitute of daily Food; and one of you say unto them, depart in Peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those Things which be needful for the Body; what doth it profit? Even so Faith, if it have not Works, is dead being alone.* And it cannot be suppos'd, he farther says, ver. 18. that that is a true Faith which produces not good Works, because they are the proper Fruits of Faith, and naturally spring from it. *A Man may say, thou hast Faith, and I have Works; shew me thy Faith without thy Works, and I will shew thee my Faith by my Works.* Again; such a Faith, i. e. a mere Belief of the Truths of the Gospel, he says, is no more than the Devils themselves have; and therefore must needs be as insufficient to save us, as it is them. ver. 19. *The Devils also believe and tremble.* And lastly; such a Faith, he shews farther, was not the Faith which render'd Abraham and other holy Men and Women in antient Times accepted by God; ver. 21. *Was not Abraham our Father justified by Works, when he had offered Isaac his Son upon the Altar? Seest thou, how Faith wrought with his Works, and by Works was his Faith made perfect.* And then, upon the whole, he concludes thus: *Ye see then how that by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only. For as the Body without the Spirit is dead, so Faith without Works is dead also.* But,

3. By those who say unto Christ, *Lord, Lord,* we may farther understand those, who not only assent to the Truths of the Gospel, but also apply the same to themselves, and hope and trust for Salvation by and from Christ.

For though indeed it be our Duty, to trust only in Christ for Salvation, in Opposition to the Opinion of Merit; yet we may trust in him too much, we may trust in him and be deceived: For so we shall certainly be, in case we are not such Persons as he has encouraged to hope and trust in him. And however such Confidence, or, as it is called, *Assurance*, has been magnified by some Men, who have in a Manner placed the whole of Religion therein, I cannot but think that, of the two, the Error of those who, through Modesty and Distrust of themselves, dare not apply the Promises of the Gospel to themselves, although they are in Truth such Persons as the Promises are made to, is both more innocent, and less dangerous, than theirs is, who being not so qualified as the Gospel requires, do nevertheless confidently hope and look for Salvation thro' the Merits of Christ.

For if a Man be indeed a good Man, and believing all the Truths and Promises of the Gospel, sets himself sincerely to obey all the Precepts of it; but yet dares not with Confidence to apply the Promises to himself, not thro' any Distrust of the Truth or Goodness of God, but only through too great a Distrust and Diffidence of himself; the worst of his Case, I presume, will be only this, that while he lives here in this World he will want that great Comfort and Consolation, which the Testimony of a good Conscience, and a reasonable Assurance of God's Love and Favour, would have yielded to him: But then, in the mean Time, being fully persuaded of the Truth of God's Promises, and of his Readiness to assist Men with his Grace in their sincere Endeavours, and not thinking himself to have already attained, or to be already so perfect, as he might, and by his constant Striving may be, he will, as the Apostle says of himself, *Phil. iii. 13. forgetting those Things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things which are before, press forward continually towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Being not yet so well assured of his Condition, and of his Right and Title to the Gospel Promises as he could wish

he was, he will, as St. Peter, 2 Pet. i. 10. exhorts, *give all Diligence to make his Calling and Election sure*, by adding one Virtue and Grace, and one Degree of Virtue and Grace to another, and by abounding in every good Work, *that he may not be so barren and unfruitful*, as he thinks he has hitherto been, *in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Whereas, on the other Side, he who is confident of himself without Cause, and trusts assuredly, that he shall be saved by *Christ*, while he yet takes no Care to become such an one as *Christ* has promised to save, does but deceive himself to his eternal Ruin. He thinks, as it is said of the Church of *Laodicea*, Rev. iii. 17. *that he is rich and increased with Goods, and has need of nothing*, while yet in Truth he is *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. Such, I say, is the Man who calls *Christ* his Lord, his Saviour, his Redeemer, and who trusts assuredly, that he shall be saved by *Christ's* Merits and Satisfaction, while yet he takes no Care to do the Things that *Christ* has commanded. He sleeps, for a while, securely in his Sins, and his Confidence encreases his Carelessness; but his Hope is altogether ungrounded, and his Assurance is nothing else but a bold and unreasonable Presumption: For tho' *Christ* be indeed *the Author of eternal Salvation*; yet he is so to those only that obey him, as the Apostle says, Heb. v. 9. But,

4. Lastly; By those who say unto *Christ*, *Lord, Lord*, and yet shall not be admitted to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, we may understand those who are very punctual and constant in the Duties of God's immediate Worship and Service, as Prayer, Reading, Hearing, Sacraments, and the like, but make no Conscience of the Duties of the second Table, consisting in the Practice of Justice and Righteousness, and Peace, and Love towards Men. For *to call upon God*, is a Phrase often used in Scripture to denote the Worship of God, and the Repetition of the Word in the Text, *Lord, Lord*, may well enough be understood to denote Fervency and Constancy in this Duty.

And taking the Words in this Sense, the Truth which they deliver to us, and instruct us in, is this; that no Acts of divine Worship, or Exercises of Religion, properly so called, are acceptable to God, or availing to our eternal Salvation, so long as we live in the Neglect of the Duties of Justice, and Peace, and Charity towards Men, or indeed, so long as we allow our selves in any Instance of Disobedience.

And there is no Point of Doctrine which the holy Scripture does more frequently remind us of, and press stronglier upon us than this, *viz.* that the Laws of God, as they are all of the same divine Authority, are consequently all of equal Obligation; so that the keeping of one Commandment will not serve to excuse us in the Neglect of another. *Whosoever*, says St. James, *shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all*, Jam. ii. 10.

And particularly, because Men are generally apt to lay the greatest Stress upon those Commands which relate more immediately to the Worship of God, the holy Scripture, that it might set the Thing strait, seems to bend it the other Way, and to give the Preference to the Duties of moral Justice and Honesty. Thus the Prophet *Hosea* says, Chap. vi. Ver. 6. *I desired Mercy and not Sacrifice, and the Knowledge of God more than Burnt-offerings*; and the Prophet *Micah*, Chap. vi. Ver. 6, 7, 8. having brought in a Man considering and advising with himself, what Course he should take to please God, and render him gracious and propitious towards him: *Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-offerings, with Calves of a Year old?*

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Will

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousands of Rivers of Oil? proceeds then at the eighth Verse to acquaint him what would be more acceptable to God than all these, or indeed than any Acts of immediate Homage and Worship whatsoever; *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And in like manner the Prophet *Isaiah*, chap. i. ver. 11, &c. comparing religious Exercises with the Practice of Justice, and Truth, and Mercy, uses such Expressions in speaking of the former, as seem to imply that they are of no Value or Consideration at all with God. *To what purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts; and I delight not in the Blood of Bulls, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your Hands, to tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations, Incense is an Abomination unto me, the New Moons and Sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies, I cannot away with, it is Iniquity, even your solemn Meeting; your New Moons and appointed Feasts my Soul hateth; they are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your Hands, I will hide mine Eyes from you; yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear:* And then at the sixteenth Verse, he goes on to tell them, what Things God would have a greater Regard to, than he had to any of these Expressions of Devotion, altho' they were such as he himself had expressly requir'd and commanded. *Wash you, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow, &c.* And to the same Sense are those Words of St. James, Jam. i. 26. *If any Man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his Tongue, but deceiveth his own Heart; this Man's Religion is vain. Pure Religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.*

But there are two Acts or Exercises of Religion in and by which, we may, in a more especial Manner, be said to call *Christ, our Lord*, or to say unto him, *Lord, Lord*; viz. hearing his Word, and putting up our Prayers and Supplications to him. For even hearing is, by Implication, calling him *Lord*; we thereby seem to own that he is our Lord, because we come to him to know his Will, and to learn what Commands he has to lay upon us; but by Prayer we do more explicitly call him our *Lord*, when we solemnly address our selves to him, owning our Dependence upon him, and seeking to him for Grace and Help.

And a great many, I fear, there are now a Days who take up their Rest in the Performance of these Duties; and so long as they are diligent in Hearing, and constant in Prayer, make no Doubt but that they shall do well enough, and be graciously accepted by God; tho' they take no Care to practise what they hear, or to work in themselves those Graces which they ask of God.

But it is not every one who thus says unto *Christ, Lord, Lord*, that shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. These indeed are both of them necessary Duties; but they are not our only Duties, neither indeed are they more necessary than other Duties are. These Things therefore we ought to do; but at the same Time we ought not to leave any other Duty undone. The Performance of these Duties is indeed an excellent Means to lead us on farther; but if we rest here, we had as good have done nothing. For,

(1.) As to Hearing; the very Nature of the Thing shews, that it is only a Means in order to somewhat else, not the End which we should rest in. For to what Purpose is it to know our Master's Will, but only that we may thereby be the better enabled to do it? And if it be not necessary for us to practise what we know, it is not worth our while to be at the Pains to learn. *Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the Things which I say?* says he himself, *Luke vi. 46.* And that *not the Hearers of the Law are just before God, but that the Doers of the Law only shall be justified*, the Apostle tells us, *Rom. ii. 13.* And, *if ye know these Things, happy are ye, if ye do them*, says our Saviour, *John xiii. 17.* And again, *Luke xi. 28. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.* But the Vanity and Insignificancy of Knowledge without Practice, and of Hearing without Doing, the Apostle St. James has shewed so fully and at large, in the first Chapter of his *Epistle*, at the twenty second and following Verses, that I shall need to add nothing more upon this Point. *Be ye Doers of the Word*, says he, *and not Hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any Man be a Hearer of the Word, and not a Doer, he is like unto a Man beholding his natural Face in a Glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his Way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of Man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect Law of Liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the Work, this Man shall be blessed in his Deed.* And,

(2.) As vain and insignificant are all our Prayers to God, whereby we may still more properly be said to own his Sovereignty and Authority, and to say unto him, *Lord, Lord*, so long as we neglect his Precepts, and are careless in our Obedience.

For though Prayer be indeed a most proper Expression of our Subjection to God, and Dependence upon him; yet the chief End also of that, is our own Good and Improvement. We pray to God to the End that we may be better than we are, that we may grow in Grace and Virtue: If therefore we take no Care to work in our selves those Graces which we ask of God, our Petitions are heartless, and they will as certainly be fruitless; for God will not work his Graces in us, without the Co-operation of our own Endeavours. And so far are the Prayers of such as wilfully continue in known Sin from being acceptable to God, and availing for the obtaining of his Grace and Pardon, that he has expressly declar'd that he will not be moved by such Petitions; nay, that they are most hateful and abominable to him. *If I regard Iniquity in my Heart, the Lord will not hear me*, says the Psalmist, *Psal. lxvi. 18.* And *when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear*, says God; *for your Hands are full of Blood*, *Isai. i. 15.* And the Wise-man tells us, *Prov. xxviii. 9.* that *he that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayers shall be an Abomination.*

Thus you see, it is not every one that says unto Christ, *Lord, Lord*, that shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Men may profess the true Faith and Religion, and yet, if they practise not according to their Profession, may be as far from Heaven as the worst of Infidels; *for many* (our Saviour himself says) *are called, but few are chosen.* Nay, they may believe as well as profess the true Faith, and yet be the Children of Perdition, if their Faith does not purify their Hearts, and better their Lives; for even the Devils themselves believe and tremble. Nay farther; they may call Christ their Saviour, and hope for Salvation from him, and yet perish everlastingly, if they be not such as he has promis'd Salvation to, who are such only as take his Yoke upon them, and learn of him. And lastly, they may do some Things well; they may be diligent in Hearing, and frequent in Prayer, and not failing in any other Exercise of religious Worship; and yet if they allow

allow themselves in any known Sin, be rather more abominable to God for their vile Flattery and Hypocrisy, than if they had never pretended to any Thing of Religion; according to what our Saviour says to the Pharisees, *Matth. xxiii. 14. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye devour Widows Houses, and for a Pretence make long Prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater Damnation.*

Having therefore now seen, who they are, who, however well conceited of by themselves, or thought well of by others, shall yet have no Portion in the Kingdom of Heaven; viz. those who say, but do nothing more than only say, *Lord, Lord*; it is Time that we now proceed in the second Place,

II. To enquire, who they are that shall be admitted into it; viz. they who do the Will of God. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

Which last Thing, the Doing the Will of God, we are not to understand as excluding the former; i. e. the saying, *Lord, Lord*; but rather as including and supposing it, and superadding to it. For though the saying, *Lord, Lord*, be not the whole of our Duty, it is however a necessary and essential Part of it; though it be not all that is required, it is however as much required as any other Duty is. And therefore,

1. He cannot be said to do the Will of God, whose Actions, though in themselves good, are not the Fruits of a lively Faith; for without Faith, the Apostle says, *it is impossible to please God*, Heb. xi. 6. And our Saviour himself says, *John vi. 29. This is the Work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*; and St. John says, 1 *Epist. iii. 23. that this is his Commandment, (i. e. it is one of his Commandments, and as necessary to be perform'd as any other,) that we should believe on the Name of his Son Jesus Christ.* Neither,

2. Can he be said to do the Will of God, who, having Faith, has it to himself, and does not make an open Profession of his Faith and Religion. For as it is with the Heart that Man believeth unto Righteousness, so it is with the Mouth that Confession is made unto Salvation, as the Apostle says, *Rom. x. 10.* And to those only who confess Christ before Men, he has promis'd that he also will confess them before his Father which is in Heaven, *Matth. x. 32.* Neither,

3. Can he be said to do the Will of God, who trusts to the Merit of his own Works for Salvation, and not to the Mercy of God in Christ Jesus: for we are taught by our Saviour, when we have done all we can, to say, we are unprofitable Servants. *Luke xvii. 10.* By St. Peter, *Acts iv. 12. that there is not Salvation in any other but Christ; for there is none other Name under Heaven given among Men whereby we must be saved:* And by St. Paul, *Rom. vi. 23. that eternal Life is the Gift of God thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.* Neither,

4. Lastly, can he be said to do the Will of God, who neglects his Worship, is rarely or never seen at Prayers, at Sacrament, at Sermons; and seldom thinks of God and Religion; tho' he be ever so square and just in his Dealings with Men. For certainly, if we are oblig'd to love our Neighbour for God's Sake, we are much rather oblig'd to love God himself with all our Heart, and with all our Soul, and with all our Strength; and if we are not allow'd to be failing in any Duty to Men, much less can we think our selves allow'd to be wanting in our bounden Duty to God.

To do the Will of God therefore does not exclude the calling him *Lord, Lord*, nor the Practice of any other Duty, but comprehends all Sorts of

to God, our Neighbour, and our selves. And we then *do* the *Will* of God; and by so doing are such as the Promises are made to, when we are both diligent in learning the Will of God, and also careful to practise it according to the best of our Knowledge, and the uttermost of our Power; when we both call *Christ* our *Lord*, and also give up our selves to be ruled and govern'd by him in all Things; when we have an equal Care about the Duties of Religion, and the Duties of Morality; and do *herein continually exercise* our selves, *to have always a Conscience void of Offence, both towards God and towards Men.* It is only upon this Ground that a Hope of Salvation can be well built; and *if our own Heart* (after a serious and thorough Examination of our selves) condemn us not, then may we have a good *Confidence towards God*; according to that of the *Psalmist*, Psal. cxix. 6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have Respect unto all thy Commandments.*

Which *Respect to all the Commandments* does not however imply in it a sinless Obedience: For if nothing less than that would be accepted as the Condition on our Part of our inheriting eternal Life, we might well ask the *Disciples* Question, *Who then can be saved?* For *in many Things we offend all*; and so we shall do, after the best Care we can take. And *there is not a just Man upon Earth, that doth good and sinneth not.* But a *Respect to all the Commandments* does imply in it a sincere Obedience, or an hearty Endeavour to do the Will of God in every Thing. Nothing less is *doing* the Will of God, than such an Obedience as is inconsistent with the Allowance of our selves in the Practice of any known Sin, or the wilful Neglect of any known Duty: And doing the Will of God (so far as it is the Matter of our Duty, and the Condition of our Happiness) is no more than this; it is Sincerity only, not Perfection. He *does* the Will of God, in the Gospel Sense of that Phrase, who does it as well as a frail Man can do it; but all that a frail Man can do, is to endeavour heartily and sincerely, and whereinfoever he has fallen into Sin thro' Frailty or Oversight, to rise again presently by Repentance, and to look better to his Goings, that he offend not in the like Manner again. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven; i. e. he that both calls upon God, and is also careful to do his Will, he, and he only, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

And what has been said upon this Subject may serve for several good Purposes; two of which I shall briefly mention, and so conclude.

1. It may serve to abate that Confidence, which we are all too apt to place in external Privileges and Advantages; as in being Members of a pure Church; in having been early dedicated to God in Baptism, and in being thereby made the *Children of God*, and *Heirs of eternal Life*; in having the *lively Oracles of God*, the holy Scriptures, committed to us; and in having all the other Means of Grace in a more plentiful Manner vouchsafed to us, than they are to most other Nations of the World.

These Things we are apt to value our selves upon; and, which is more unreasonable still, we are apt to despise others; nay and to condemn them too as Reprobates, only because they have not the like Advantages. We are apt to think these such sure Tokens of God's extraordinary Kindness and Good-will to us above all others, that we need not much fear, that we shall ever, for any Misbehaviour of ours, be cast out of his Favour: We are apt to flatter our selves, that he will either see no Faults, or at least, that he will be easily moved to pass by and forgive all Faults in those, to whom he has shew'd himself to be so kindly affected,

But let us not deceive our selves; for *God is no Respector of Persons*, but as *in every Nation he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted*

cepted of him; so no Person, of what Nation or Church soever he be, will be accepted by him upon any other Terms: *Not every one that saith unto him, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he only that doth the Will of God which is in Heaven.*

The Jews had formerly as much Cause to value themselves upon such Accounts, as we have now; for they were the Children of Abraham, and the Heirs of the Promise: *To them, as the Apostle says, Rom. ix. 4. pertained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the Service of God, and the Promises; theirs were the Fathers, and of them as concerning the Flesh, Christ came.* And yet, tho' they were so highly in Favour with God, and so nearly related to Christ, when he came unto his own, and his own received him not, he likewise rejected them from being his People; and they who were once the Children of the Kingdom were cast into outer Darknes. And this St. John Baptist, the Forerunner of Christ, had told them before would be; *Matth. iii. 8. Bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance; and think not to say within your selves, We have Abraham to our Father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these Stones to raise up Children unto Abraham.* And now also the Ax is laid unto the Root of the Trees; therefore every Tree, which bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the Fire. And it is to us Christians that the Apostle speaks, *Rom. xi. 20.* warning us, by their Example, to take Care that we incur not the same Fate: *They, because of Unbelief, were broken off, and thou standest by Faith; be not high minded, but fear; for if God spared not the Natural Branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.*

It must be own'd indeed, that the Privileges, which we enjoy by our Christianity, are greater than theirs were: But be they ever so great, they will be of no real Advantage to us, unless we make a right Use of them. And the more Knowledge we have, the larger is our Duty; and the better our Hope is, the more strongly are we bound to purify our selves; and the more Means of Grace are vouchsafed to us, the more are we obliged to bring forth Fruit abundantly. And if we are not rendred much better by our Christianity, and by all the Light, and Help, and Encouragement which God has afforded us; it will be only so much the worse for us; our Punishment will be so much the greater, and our Judgment the more deserved. For as our Saviour says, *Luke xii. 47, 48. That Servant which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes:* And the Reason follows; *for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* And therefore St. Peter says well of all wicked Christians, *2 Pet. ii. 21. That it had been better for them not to have known the Way of Righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn away from the holy Commandment delivered unto them.* But,

2. And to conclude; if not every one that saith, *Lord, Lord, but he only that doth the Will of God* is capable of the Gospel-Promises; this may serve to shew us, how very unsafe it is to trust to a Death-bed Repentance; and how very unlikely it is, that such a Repentance should be true and availing.

We ought indeed always to hope and believe the best we can of others; and therefore, because we cannot tell how powerful the Grace of God may have been, or what a great Change may have been wrought in the Minds of some Men, even at the Hour of Death, it is our Part to leave them to the Judgment of God, who knows all Things, and will judge the World with Equity.

But, as to our selves, it may be useful to us, now in Time to consider, that all that seems possible to be done upon a Death-bed, does not come up

to that Description of Repentance which is given us in the holy Scripture, which comprehends not only the *ceasing to do evil*, but the *learning to do well*; not only the *turning from our Sins*, but the *doing that which is lawful and right*; not only the *denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts*, but the *living soberly, righteously and godly in this present World, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God*.

Now how all this can be done upon a Death-bed, we see not; and therefore it must needs be infinitely hazardous to delay our Repentance till that Time, in hope that it will be then availing. For the most which seems possible, or at least likely to be done then, is to hear, and read, and learn, and pray, and vow, and resolve; but all these put together are not the same with living well, or (as our Saviour here expresses it) *doing the Will of God*, to which only the Promise of the Kingdom of God is made. A sick or dying Man may say, *Lord, Lord*; Lord, he may say, *open to me*; Lord, *have Mercy upon me*; Lord, *forgive me*; Lord, *receive my Soul*; and the like: And more than this, it is to be fear'd, they cannot ordinarily do, who purposely defer Repentance to a Death-bed. But if they do, and if they can do, no more than this, I do not see how they can obtain a good Assurance of Salvation, consistently with the Truth of what our Saviour says in the Text: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven*. Most justly rather may all such as put off all Thoughts of living well, till they shall find themselves a dying, fear lest that should then befall them which is threatned in Prov. i. 24, &c. *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my Hands, and no Man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my Counsel, and would none of my Reproof; I also will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction cometh as a Whirlwind; when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you: Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me*.

O consider this then, ye that forget God, and seek the Lord now, while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, Psal. l. 22. Isa. lv. 6. *Strive to enter in at the strait Gate, now while it is open to you; for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able. And when once the Master of the House shall have shut to the Door, it will be to no Purpose to knock at it, and to say, Lord, Lord, open to us; for he has told us already what the Answer he will then give will be, viz. this, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye Workers of Iniquity*, Luke xiii. 24, 25, 27.

May God therefore of his infinite Mercy, give us all Grace, to know now in this our Day, the Things that belong unto our Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes, Luke xix. 42.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons, and one God, be given (as is most due) all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.



D I S

DISCOURSE LXXXV.

False Pretensions to Salvation.

MATT. VII. 22, 23.

Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.



HE Unprofitableness of professing the Christian Religion without a Practice suitable thereto, and the Insufficiency of Faith without Works, and the Vanity of relying on *Christ* for Salvation without performing the Conditions required by him in order to it; and the Unacceptableness of any, or even all the Acts and Exercises of religious Worship, without a like Regard to the Duties of the second Table; our *Saviour* had declar'd in the foregoing Words, on which I discoursed the last Time: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

And he still pursues the same Design, viz. to shew that nothing can render a Man accepted by God without Obedience. Only here in the Text, to make the Point plainer, or else to impress the Belief and Consideration of it more strongly on his Hearers, and thereby the more effectually to engage them not to trust to any Thing which might deceive them, but to build their Hope of Salvation on the surest Bottom; he instances in some other false Grounds of Hope and Confidence towards God, such as might be thought, either higher and more excellent Attainments on their Part, or else, on God's Part, plainer and surer Tokens of his Favour and special Kindness towards them, than were those which he had before meant by that Phrase of *calling him Lord, Lord*. For, says he, (and this I take to be the Connexion between the Text and the foregoing Verse) so far is it from being enough to entitle a Man to Heaven, only to make Profession of the Christian Faith, and an outward Shew of Religion, that a Man may

seem to go a great deal farther than this in the Way to Heaven, and yet never come thither; he may do a great deal more than this, and yet not do enough. For, *many*, says he, *will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.*

Now to preach *Christ* to others is plainly more than only to believe on him our selves; and to propagate his Faith and Religion is more than only to profess it; if therefore they who do the former, that is, who preach the Gospel, and are, it is probable, thereby the Means and Instruments of bringing many others to Salvation, may yet fall short of it themselves, and become Cast-aways, in case they do not practise themselves those good Rules of Life which they teach to others; it is plain then that nothing but Obedience will do; it is plain that nothing will serve instead of Obedience to recommend us to God's Grace and Acceptance. For if a Man's own Obligation to obey God might be bought off by any Thing else which he could do, nothing seems to be a fairer Price to bid for it, than the bringing other Men to a Sight and Sense of their Duty, which is what, it may well be suppos'd, they do, who are Preachers of the Gospel. They therefore, if any, may be thought exempt from personal Service, who bring in others to serve, as it were, in their stead. But now this is what our *Saviour* here says, cannot be; but that even they who are instrumental in turning others to Righteousness, shall perish in their own Sins, if they themselves are Workers of Iniquity.

And again; to have the Gift of Prophecy, and a Power of working Miracles in the Name of *Christ*, vouchsafed to us, may well be deem'd an higher Favour, than it is only to be admitted to see the Miracles which are wrought by others, or than only to be born in a Country where the Gospel is, upon good Evidence, received and embraced. If therefore they who have those excellent Gifts of Prophecy and Miracles, may yet finally perish, and will certainly do so, in case they live not as becomes that Gospel, the Truth whereof they are, by the singular Favour of God, enabled to make such Proof of to others; it is plain, that there can be no Ground for any Person whatever, in how high Favour soever he may think himself with God, upon the Account of any Privileges or Advantages which are afforded him above others, thereupon to entertain a Hope, that God will deal more favourably with him in the other World, than he will with the rest of Mankind, altho' his Life should not be in all Points so regular and unblameable as it ought to have been. It is plain by this, that *God is no Respector of Persons*, but will judge all Men at last by the same Rules; it is plain, that there is no Way for any of us to gain his Love, and obtain his Promises, but by Obedience to his Precepts; and that all Hope of his Favour, which is not grounded upon the Testimony of a good Conscience, is no better than an unreasonable Presumption.

It being therefore manifestly the main Design of our *Saviour* in these Words, to declare (as he had done in the foregoing Verse) that nothing less than a Carefulness to please God in all the Duties of an holy Life, is sufficient to entitle us to his Love, and to make us capable of the Gospel-Promises; and that Point being, as I hope, sufficiently prov'd and illustrated, in the Discourse which I made the last Time upon those Words; I suppose I shall not need now to add any Thing more to the same Purpose.

What I intend therefore at present is only to take notice of some other Truths, which are as it were, occasionally hinted and suggested to us in these

these Words, and which may be of very good Use to us to consider, and to exercise a while our Meditation upon.

And the Observations which I shall draw from the Words, and shall take occasion at this Time briefly to speak to, shall be of two Sorts: 1. Such Observations as the Text itself offers to our Consideration; and, 2. Such Inferences and Deductions as may be easily and naturally drawn from those first Observations, and which have a more immediate Reference to Practice. And for the greater Clearness, I shall to every Observation of the former Sort immediately subjoin those practical Inferences which are naturally deducible from the same. *Many will say to me in that Day, &c.* And,

I. One Thing which these Words offer to be considered by us, is this; that Confidence of a Man's own self, and a good Assurance towards God, is no certain Argument of a Man's being in a State of Grace and Salvation.

This we may gather from what our *Saviour* here says of the Persons here spoken of, who were Sons of Perdition, for he says he will *profess* unto them, *I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*; and yet of *many* of these he says, that they shall have the Confidence to stand upon their own Justification, even before God himself, and to claim the Promises of the Gospel, as of right belonging to them. *Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? &c.* It is as if they had said; "We surely, who have done so much for thee, need not fear being shut out of thy Kingdom; we may rather well expect the highest Place and the best Portion there." But their Sentence was quite different from what they expected; *depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*. From whence therefore, I say, it appears, that a Man may both live and die in a good Opinion of himself, and yet not be such an one as shall be finally acquitted and justified before God; and that, as the Apostle says, 2 Cor. x. 18. *not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth*.

For some who live in the Practice of very notorious and scandalous Sins, may yet conceit well of themselves, and entertain a good Hope towards God, by reason of some false Notions in Religion which they have embraced; as that God sees no Sin in his Children; that a true Belief is all which is requisite to render us just before God; that the Righteousness of *Christ* was performed in our stead, and was designed to excuse us from it; and the like; Opinions, which plainly evacuate our whole Obligation to Holiness and Virtue.

And others there may be, who may conceit well of themselves, only because they are not openly and scandalously vitious; when yet, at the same Time, their shew of Piety and Virtue is only affected to gain Praise and Applause from Men; and yet this they themselves may not be sensible of; they may not discern the Falseness and Hypocrisy of their own Hearts; but because they do the Things which are good, may readily conclude that they are such Persons as they should be, and have nothing in them which needs to be reformed. Such an one, doubtless, was the *Pharisee*, spoken of by our *Saviour*, Luke xviii. 10. He thought very well of himself, and knew not wherein he was to blame, or else he would not have dared to commend himself as he did, even before God: *God I thank thee, that I am not as other Men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as this Publican*. And yet our *Saviour* himself tells us, at the fourteenth Verse of that Chapter, that this Man, tho' so highly conceited of himself, was not approved by God; nay, that the penitent and humble *Publican*, whom he so much despised, *went down to his House justified rather than he*.

It being therefore a Matter of some Difficulty to know our selves, and also a Matter of the highest Importance to us, that we should make a right Judgment of our selves; it is plainly our Interest as well as our Duty, to take the best Method we can for this Purpose.

And that is the Use we should make of this Observation; it should put us upon a thorough searching of our Hearts, and trying of our Ways, to see whether our Hearts are right with God, and our Ways such as are pleasing to him, and will be approved by him. For it will be a most sad Disappointment to us, when we shall have spent our Days here in a pleasing Dream, and shall be gone out of this World in Peace, and with a full Assurance of the Goodness of our own Estate, to hear then those Words from the Mouth of our angry Judge; *go ye cursed; depart from me, for I know you not, ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And the only Way to prevent this dangerous and fatal Mistake, is to labour now, while we continue in this World, to obtain a right Knowledge of our selves, and to pass, if it be possible, the same Judgment upon our selves now, which our Judge would pass upon us, if we were now immediately to be summoned before his Tribunal. For *if we would judge our selves, we should not be judged*, as the *Apostle* says, *1 Cor. xi. 31.*

And the Method whereby to know whether our Actions are such as are pleasing to God, is diligently to examine them by the Rule of God's Commandments; and the Means to approve our selves to him, is, whereinsoever we have offended, either in omitting what has been commanded, or in doing what has been forbidden, to be heartily sorry for our Misdoings, and careful to do so no more.

And the best Way to know whether our Heart be right with God, tho' as the *Prophet* says, *Jer. xvii. 9. The Heart of Man is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* The best Way, I think, to know, so far as it can be known by us, whether our Heart be right with God, is to examine well our Thoughts, and our secret Behaviour, which we are sure are known to none but God. For *if our own Hearts condemn us* in these Matters, *God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things.*

If then, we are conscious to our selves of our own Falseness and Hypocrisy; if when we do any Action which is seemingly good, we know that we do it with an ill Design; or if we observe that we are not so careful to avoid secret Acts of Dishonesty or Uncleaness, as we are to avoid such outward Acts thereof as would expose us to temporal Shame or Punishment; than we may be sure that God does not approve us, because we must be conscious that it is not our Design to approve our selves to him.

But, on the other Side; if our own Heart condemn us not, in these Matters, then, as the *Apostle* says, *have we Confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 21.* If we are as careful and conscientious in the Duties of private Devotion, as we seem to be in the publick Exercises of Religion; if we are as watchful to avoid wandring Thoughts in Prayer, as we are to avoid outward and open Irreverence; if we no more dare to hate our Brother in our Heart, than to curse him with our Tongue, or strike him with our Hand; and the like in other Cases; these are good Tokens of our Uprightness and Integrity, and upon these Evidences of our sincere Piety and Charity, we may ground such a good Hope towards God, as will not make us ashamed: According to that of the *Apostle*, *2 Cor. i. 12. Our Rejoycing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we have had our Conversation in the World.*

II. Another Thing which the Text offers to our Observation is this; that a good Knowledge of our Duty may be without the Practice of it; and that when it is so, it is in no wise availing to our eternal Salvation.

For the Persons whom our *Saviour* here speaks of, whom he styles *Workers of Iniquity*, and whom he declares he will pass the Sentence of Condemnation upon at the last Day, were such as had attain'd to very good Knowledge in Matters of Religion, being such as had been sent by God himself to be Teachers thereof to others, and had been enabled by him to confirm the Goodness and Truth of their Doctrine by miraculous Operations. *Have we not, say they, prophesied in thy Name? i. e.* Didst not thou thy self send us out to preach thy Gospel? *And have we not in thy Name, i. e.* by Power deriv'd from thee, *cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works?* If therefore such as these, who were so well instructed in the Will of God, that they were fit to be Teachers and Instructors of others; and who were not only, as we may well conceive, thoroughly persuaded of the Truth of Religion, but likewise enabled, by the Power of God, to give the best Proof thereof to the World, by Signs, and Wonders, and mighty Works; I say, if such as these might, for all their Knowledge, be condemned for their wicked Works, then it plainly appears, both that Knowledge may be without Practice, and also that Knowledge without Practice is not profitable to Salvation.

And from the Consideration of this Point we may be instructed,

1. What kind of Knowledge is the most valuable, and to the Acquisition whereof we ought chiefly to apply our selves, *viz.* that which has the nearest Relation to, and the greatest Influence upon Practice. By this we learn, what Books, nay and what Portions of Scripture too, are the most profitable to be read and studied by us, *viz.* those which do most clearly inform our Judgment in Points of Conscience, or do most strongly incite and stir us up to the Performance of our Duty. And if we are diligent in the Study of these Places, which are easy to be understood, which describe the great Lines of our Duty, and hold forth, in the clearest Expressions, the great Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel; these alone, if they be read with an honest Mind, will make us *wise unto Salvation*, tho' we should live and dye in Ignorance of the Meaning of those Places, which are of harder or more doubtful Interpretation. Whereas, on the other Side, the greatest Skill which is attainable by Man, in the Criticisms, History, or Chronology of the Bible, or in other Points of sacred Learning which are the hardest to be attained, will be of no Profit at all to him, who, while he is taken up with these Studies, neglects or overlooks the plain Truths and Duties of Christianity.

2. By the Consideration of this Point we are also instructed, what End we should propose to our selves in the hearing Sermons, or reading the Bible and other good Books, or in the Use of any other Means of Knowledge which are afforded to us; namely, not to fill our Heads with Notions, nor to furnish our Tongues with Talk; but to inform our Judgments, and to direct our Practice; that *being not unwise, but understanding what the Will of the Lord is*, we may be able to know, in all Circumstances and Conditions of Life, how we ought to walk and to please God; and by the Motives of the Gospel may be effectually persuaded to do his Will, in every Point, according to the best of our Knowledge.

3. Lastly, we are also from the Consideration of this Point farther instructed, not to rest in the *Opus operatum* of hearing Sermons, or reading the Bible and other good Books, but to consider these only as Means in order to a farther End; which End if we come short of, all the Time which was spent in the Means will be only so much Time lost or mispent.

Excellent Means indeed these must be granted to be of Improvement in Grace and Virtue; for which Reason they are, by no means, in their proper Season to be neglected: For we cannot do the Will of God unless we know it; and we shall hardly be inclin'd to do it, being encompass'd about with so many Temptations, unless our Wills are strongly moved thereto by the frequent and serious Consideration of the Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel. That therefore we may know our Master's Will, it is necessary both that we should look for it there where he has declar'd it, *viz.* in the holy Scripture, and also that we should *seek the Law at the Mouth of his Priests, the Messengers of the Lord, whose Lips should keep Knowledge*, Mal. ii. 7. and that we may be incited to do his Will, it is likewise necessary, that we should understand the Danger of transgressing it, and the Profit and Reward of Obedience. And to attain a right Understanding in these Things, is the proper End and Business of hearing Sermons, and reading the Scripture, and all other Means of spiritual Instruction. But we widely mistake, if we think that our whole Duty does consist in these religious Exercises; or that our Work is done only by our knowing what the Work is which we have to do. For all this Knowledge is in order to Practice; and therefore we should not, we cannot in Reason, think our selves the better for our Knowledge, unless we are made better by it. Nay indeed, if we continue still in the same Sins which we lived in before, we had better have continued in our former Ignorance too; for our greater Knowledge will only add to our Condemnation. And tho' we spend ever so much Time in hearing Sermons, and reading the Scriptures and other good Books, we shall be still but in the Condition of those *silly Women* whom St. Paul speaks of, 2 Tim. iii. 6, 7. *Silly Women, laden with Sins, led away with diverse Lusts; ever learning, and never able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth.*

III. Another Thing which the Text gives us Occasion to observe, is this; that very excellent Gifts of God for the Benefit of others may be, and sometimes are bestowed upon bad Men. For bad Men without doubt they were, to whom our Saviour, the righteous Judge of the World, will *profess* at the last Day, saying, *I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*: And yet on some of these were bestowed the most excellent Gifts; for, say they, *have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?*

If therefore these most excellent and spiritual Gifts, the Gift of Prophecy, and the Power of Miracles, and the receiving Commission from God to be his Messengers and Ambassadors, are no sure Marks of God's Approbation of the Persons they are given to, nor certain Tokens of God's special Favour and Affection to them, as it is plain from the Text they are not; much less can any other Gift or Blessing of God, which is merely secular, at least, which has not so near a Respect and Relation to another Life, such as Riches, Honour, Health, Length of Days, prosperous Success in the Enterprises which a Man takes in Hand, and the like; much less, I say, can any such Gifts as these, be reasonably deemed Signs of God's extraordinary Love to the Persons on whom they are bestowed, or to be taken for an Argument that God does well like that Course of Life which they lead, or that Cause which they are engaged in, and that he means by this Blessing of his Providence to declare his Approbation thereof. Nay the contrary to this is commonly much truer, *viz.* that *there be just Men to whom it hapneth according to the Work of the Wicked, and wicked Men to whom it hapneth according to the Work of the Righteous*: as the Wise-man observes, Eccles. viii. 14. or rather as he observes again, chap. ix. ver. 2. that *all Things, in this World, come alike to all, and there is one Event to the Righteous*

and to the Wicked: So that consequently (as he had said at the first Verse of that Chapter) *no Man knoweth Love or Hatred by all that is before him.*

The Consideration of this therefore should teach us, to examine every Action or Cause, which we have any Occasion to examine, by the written Law of God, and the clear Dictates of right Reason, by which it will be easy to discern, whether it be good or bad; and not boldly to venture to imitate what another has done, presuming it to be well done, only because it has good Success; nor to be discouraged from a good Cause, or from doing what appears to us to be lawful and right, only because the same Thing done by another has not been attended with such a visible Blessing of Providence, as might, we think, have been expected upon a righteous Cause, or a praise-worthy Action.

Especially it should teach us, not to be either lifted up in our Conceit, or cast down to a Sort of Desperation, by any Dispensation of Providence towards us in the World; but rather, that we should look upon the Afflictions which befall us, by which Men are most apt to be dejected, as the Chastisements of a wise and gracious Father, and consequently as Tokens of his Love; and as such we should be thankful for them, and careful to improve them to our best spiritual Advantage: And, on the other Side, we should look upon Prosperity, by which Men are most apt to be lifted up in Conceit, and fondly to presume themselves the Favourites of Heaven; we should look upon that, I say, only as a more difficult Sort of Trial which God is pleased to put us to, as a State of Life in which it will not be so easy for us to maintain a serious Sense of Religion, and to preserve our Innocence. We should consider, that the worst Men have usually been observed to be the most prosperous; and that *the Prosperity of Fools shall destroy them*, as it is said, *Prov. i. 32.* But,

IV. Another Observation, which the Text gives us Occasion to make, is this; that such as for their evil Deeds shall themselves be judg'd unworthy of eternal Life, may yet be the Means and Instruments of bringing others to it. For some of those, you see here, to whom our Saviour shall say at the last Day, *Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*, have been employed by him to preach his Gospel to the World, and to give convincing Proof of the Truth of it. *Have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?*

Even Judas himself, the Son of Perdition, as our Saviour styles him, *John xvii. 12.* is particularly noted to have been sent forth by our Lord, with the other Apostles, to preach the Gospel; *Matth. x. 4.* And to him, as well as to the rest, was given the Power of doing miraculous Works, *Ver. 8.* *Heal the Sick, cleanse the Lepers, raise the Dead, cast out Devils:* To him, as well as to the rest, after they had received this Commission, it was said by our Lord, *Ver. 40.* *He that receiveth you, receiveth me;* and there can be no Reason to question, but that his Ministry was, thro' the Grace of God, as effectual as any of theirs, for the Conversion of those whom they were sent to preach the Gospel to.

From hence therefore (and it is the Use we should make of this Observation) we may be satisfied of the Truth of what our Church teaches us, in the twenty sixth Article of Religion, in these Words; "Altho' in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief Authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments; yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own Name, but in *Christ's*, and do minister by his Commission and Authority, we may use their Ministry, both in hearing the Word of God, and in receiving the Sacraments.

“ Neither is the Effect of *Christ's* Ordinance taken away by their Wickedness; nor the Grace of God's Gifts diminished from such as by Faith rightly do receive the Sacraments ministred unto them; which be effectual because of *Christ's* Institution and Promise, altho' they be ministred by evil Men.”

And this is a Point which is of very great Use to be firmly believed and well considered by us; not only by those whose unhappy Lot it is to live under the Ministry of such as are scandalously vitious, but even by all. For if there was a *Judas* even among the *Apostles*; and if notwithstanding all the Care which can be taken by the Governors of the Church, there may be some admitted to holy Orders, and commissioned to preach the Gospel, and administer the Sacraments, who will give great Scandal to the Church by their wicked Lives, before they can be fairly convicted of their Crimes, and justly deposed for the same; much rather may it well be supposed, that after all the Care which can possibly be taken by Church Governors, (who are but Men, and cannot see into the Heart,) there may be some admitted to, and continued in, this sacred Employment, who, tho' their outward Behaviour be unblameable, are yet Hypocrites in Heart; and that is in this Respect, as bad to the People, as if they were openly wicked. For Hypocrites are as bad Men in themselves, and as odious to God, and will as certainly be condemned by him at the last Day, as the most openly wicked and profane: And the Service of those, who draw near to God with their flattering Lips, while they keep their Hearts far away, is as vain and unacceptable to God, as theirs is who worship him with profane Lips, and polluted Hands. He no more hears the Prayers of those who incline to Wickedness in their Hearts, than of those who make an open Practice of it.

So that unless it be firmly believed, that the Efficacy of the Word and Sacraments depends wholly upon the Grace of God, and the Institution of *Christ*, and the Honesty and good Disposition of the Hearts of those who hear the Word, and partake of the holy Sacraments; and not at all upon the Worthiness of those Men in holy Orders, to whom the Ministration thereof is committed, no good *Christian* can ever have Ease and Quiet in his own Mind. For tho' he knows no ill by his Minister, still he may suspect it; or he may be a very bad Man, tho' he is not at all suspected to be so; or tho' none can charge him with any open Crime, it may still be suspected, or fear'd at least, that he is an Hypocrite; so that the People communicating with him must needs be ever in Uncertainty, whether the Word and Sacraments ministred by him will have that good Effect upon them which they were design'd for: And if out of a Fear or Jealousy of this, they should remove themselves from under his Ministry to another's, yet still there will be Ground for the same Fear; still they will, and must needs be uncertain, whether this last Man be so good a Person, as they take him to be.

This Notion therefore of the Efficacy of the divine Ordinances depending upon the Worthiness of Ministers, is plainly as ensnaring to Men's Minds, and as apt to fill them with Scruples, which can never be cured or removed, as the *Popish* Doctrine of the Necessity of the Priest's Intention; according to which Doctrine, if it were true, no Person could ever be sure, that he was rightly ordained, or validly baptised, or that he ever had, or could receive the holy Communion to his Soul's Health; because he never could be certain, without a special Revelation, of the actual Intention of the Bishop who ordained him, or of the Priest who administered either of the Sacraments to him; and much less could he ever be certain, that there never was a Want of actual Intention to ordain, or baptise, or to consecrate the Elements; or an Intention not to ordain, or baptise, or consecrate, in any of all those Bishops or Priests, from the *Apostles* Days down to his Time, thro'

whose

whose Hands Orders have been successively confer'd, or the Sacraments successively administred.

But if it be believed, as it is most certainly true, that the Efficacy of the divine Ordinances does not depend upon the Worthiness, any more than it does upon the secret Intention, of the Ministers of Religion; this yields great Ease and Comfort to all honest-hearted *Christians*, even tho' it be their Lot to live under the Ministry of such, of whose Unworthiness they are but too well assured. For then their only Care will be, to look to themselves, and to their own Hearts; and they will not fear being defiled by holding Communion in religious Offices with such as are Sinners, so long as they do not partake with them in their Sins.

It appertains indeed, as our Church says well in the Article before cited; it appertains, I say, to the Discipline of the Church, that Inquiry be made of evil Ministers; and that they be accused by those who have Knowledge of their Offences; and finally, that being found guilty, they may be by just Judgment deposed. But the Exercise of this Discipline (except of that Part of it which requires that evil Ministers be accused by those who have Knowledge of their Offences) belongs only to the Governors of the Church; and if they are therein faulty or remiss, the Blame will lie wholly on them. And therefore the People, as they may use the Ministry of such evil Men, until their Wickedness is discovered; so likewise may they use it, after their Wickedness is discovered, until they are by just Judgment removed from the Ministry; it being no Business of theirs to exercise this Discipline, and no Man being justly chargeable with any Body's Faults but his own, or those of others which he is some ways accessory to. And if he may lawfully go on to communicate with them in religious Offices, so long as they are continued in the Ministry, then he ought not upon this Account or Pretence to withdraw himself from their Communion; for nothing can justify the making a Schism or Separation from the establish'd Church to which we belong, but only the Necessity of it, in order to the avoiding of Sin. And thus our *Saviour* himself determined the Case, with respect to the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who at that Time were the lawful and authorised Guides of the People, and the publick Teachers and Expounders of the Law. Very bad Men they were, as our *Saviour* shews at large, and in several Instances, in the twenty third Chapter of *St. Matthew*: But this, he tells the People, at the second Verse of that Chapter, was not a sufficient Reason for them to withdraw themselves from their Teaching, and to set up other Teachers by their own Authority; but rather, that so long as they did *sit in Moses Seat*, it was the People's Duty to hearken to them, and be directed by them. *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses Seat; all therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* But,

V. Another Thing which the Text offers to our Observation is this; that even among those who seem to be in the best Capacity of knowing the Will of God, and who may be presumed to be the most careful to do it; there are a great many, who do not live answerably to their Knowledge, and to those Obligations to Holiness and Virtue which are laid upon them.

For the Persons spoken of in the Text were such as were commissioned by God to teach his Will, and they who were fit to teach it cannot be suppos'd to be without a good Knowledge of it themselves; *have we not*, say they, *prophefied in thy Name?* They were also such as were enabled by God to make good Proof of their Doctrine by working Miracles in Confirmation of it; *have we not*, say they, *in thy Name cast out Devils; and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?* And it can hardly be supposed that a Man should not be persuaded himself of the Truth of those Doctrines, which he is enabled

abled to prove so strongly to others. And yet these very Persons, and not one, or two, or a few of them, but *many* of them were *Workers of Iniquity*, and did not practise themselves those Things which they taught to others. *Many*, says our Saviour, *will say unto me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, &c. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.*

There being therefore, as our Saviour here observes, *many* of those from whom we might well have expected the best Patterns and Examples, who shall be condemned at the last Day for their evil Deeds; it plainly follows, that there is no Man, how wise and knowing soever we may esteem him, whose Example may in all Things be safely follow'd, without examining by the Rule, whether the Pattern which he sets us be good or bad. Even they who are themselves Preachers of Righteousness may not live up to those good Rules which they teach; as it is plain the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* before spoken of did not: And therefore our Saviour himself in the place before cited, where he commands the People to observe their Directions, gives them a Caution against following their Example; *Whatsoever*, says he, *they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their Works, for they say and do not.*

We are sure we do well, while we observe the Rule which God has set us, and live according to it; but we cannot be sure of this, if, without Regard to the Rule, we blindly follow any Man's Example. For Men of the greatest Knowledge in Matters of Religion are not always Men of the strictest Lives; the wisest Men are not always the best Men; or if they were, yet even the best Men have their Failings, and for that Reason cannot safely be imitated in all Things. And therefore we find, that St. Paul himself, tho' he endeavour'd doubtless to set the best Pattern which he could to others; yet when he advises the *Corinthians* to follow it, as he does in 1 Cor. xi. 1. does it with a Limitation, implying in it an Exhortation to them first to examine it, and to be satisfied of the Goodness of it, before they follow'd it. *Be ye Followers of me*, says he, *even as* (or, so far as) *I also am of Christ.*

I shall mention at present but only one Thing more, which the Text gives us Occasion to observe, and so conclude, *viz.*

VI. Lastly, that how much soever Men may be mistaken in their Opinion, either of themselves or others, while they continue in this World, the Day of Judgment will set all right, will shew every Man in his own true and proper Colours, and fully discover every Work, of what Sort it is. *Many will say unto me in that Day, have we not done so and so? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, &c.*

In that Day, I will profess unto them, i. e. at the Day of Judgment; for that that is the Time here spoken of, there can be no Doubt; this same Phrase, *that Day*, being frequently in Scripture used to denote the Day of Judgment, even where nothing had been said before to restrain or determine its Sense: But here the Sense of it is plainly determin'd by what had been said in the foregoing Verse; *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; and then it follows, *many will say to me in that Day, i. e.* in that Day, in which Admittance shall be given to some into the Kingdom of Heaven, and others shall be shut out.

In that Day of glorious Light there will be an End put to all Mistakes of Men concerning themselves or others: There will be then a full and clear Discovery made of all Men, and of all the Actions they have done, whether good or bad. *There is nothing cover'd that shall not then be reveal'd, nothing hid that shall not then be known*: All the secret Works of Darkness shall then be brought to Light, and the Counsels of all Hearts shall then be made manifest.

This will be the Business of that great and terrible Day of the Lord, to

bring every good Work into Judgment with every secret Thing, whether it be good or bad, and to separate the Sheep from the Goats, and to give to every Man according as his Works have been, (without any Regard to the Shew and Appearance which they made in the World, to the Opinion which was had of them, to the worldly Condition they were in, or to the Advantages or Privileges which they enjoy'd) to them who by patient Continuance in well doing, seek for Glory and Honour and Immortality, eternal Life; and to all such as obey not the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that did evil; even tho' he had been a Preacher, or a Prophet, or an Apostle, or a Worker of Miracles, in the Name of Christ, for there is no respect of Persons with God.

This is what the Text suggests to our Thoughts, what the holy Scripture elsewhere frequently and at large reminds and assures us of; and what we our selves, at least every Time we meet together in the House of God to worship, do in repeating the Creed solemnly profess to believe.

The good Use therefore which we should make of this Consideration is comprehended in those Words of St. Peter, 2 Pet. iii. 14. with which I shall conclude: *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such Things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in Peace, without Spot and blameless.*

Which that we may all be, God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, &c.



DISCOURSE LXXXVI.

The Difference between the Hypocrite and the sincere Christian in a Day of Trial.

MATTH. VII. 24, 25, 26, 27.

Therefore whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock :

And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a Rock :

And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand ;

And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell ; and great was the Fall of it.



OUR Lord in the foregoing Verses had intimated that Men might believe and profess his Religion, and yet not lead their Lives answerably to it ; and not only so, but that they might be Teachers of his Religion, and be enabled by God to work Miracles for the Proof and Confirmation of it, and yet continue in the Practice of those Sins which were plainly condemned by it. He had also plainly declar'd that nothing less than a Carefulness to practise according to our Knowledge and Belief is sufficient to recommend us to God's Favour and Acceptance, and to make us capable of his Promises: That neither the bare Knowledge of the Truth, nor a mere Belief of the Doctrines of the Gospel, nor only the Profession of the Faith of *Christ*, no nor yet great Zeal and Diligence in preaching the Gospel to others, altho' join'd with a Power of working

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ing Miracles for the Confirmation of it; that none, I say, of all these Things, neither separately, nor jointly, would do, without a good Life. All this he had declared, in the Verses before the Text: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say unto me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.*

And to those Words, these which I have now read to you, and am at this Time to discourse of, are very fitly subjoined, both as a natural Inference from what he had said just before, and likewise as a proper Conclusion to his whole Sermon. *Therefore, whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man which built his House upon a Rock.— And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand, &c.*

In which Words our Saviour expresses the very same Sense two different Ways; thereby to impress the Consideration thereof the more strongly upon his Hearers,

First, he puts the Case of a Man who embraces, believes, and professes the Doctrine of the Gospel, as the same was taught by our Saviour in all his Sermons and Discourses, and especially in this famous Sermon of his upon the Mount, and who being persuaded of the Truth of his Doctrine, takes care to regulate his own Practice thereby; who adds Works to his Faith; who not only professes Christianity, but lives it; and who upon the Testimony of his own Conscience, that he does not knowingly and wilfully transgress his Duty in any Point, either doing what is forbidden, or omitting what is commanded, grounds a good Hope or Assurance towards God: And this Man, our Saviour says, is like unto one that builds his House upon a Rock. His Meaning is, that this Man's Hope or Assurance towards God is very well grounded; so that in taking this Course he expresses the same sort of Wisdom that a Man does, who, in building his House, is, above all Things, careful to have it set upon a good Bottom; wisely considering, that how calm and serene soever the Season may be at present, it is not likely that it should last so always; and that therefore he ought in Reason so to contrive the House which he designs for the Place of his constant Residence, that it may abide and be fit for him to dwell in, in all Weathers; and this it will be, if it be well grounded, if the Foundation be laid upon a Rock: Which is what our Saviour means in the next Words; *and the Rain descended, and the Floods came; (i. e. the Land-floods, which had been occasioned by the Abundance of Rain,) and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a Rock.*

After this, and in the next Words, our Saviour puts the Case the other Way, and supposes a Man persuaded of the Truth of the Gospel, and making open Profession thereof, but not careful to practise the good Rules of Life which are therein given; *every Man that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them not:* And this Man, he supposes, might also conceive a good Hope or Assurance towards God, out of an Opinion, that it was enough to have Faith, and to make Profession of the Christian Religion; and that Christ would not disown for his Servants any who professed themselves such, and said unto him, *Lord, Lord.* And this Man our Saviour here likens to a foolish Builder, who raises a fair and beautiful Superstructure without laying a good Foundation, who builds upon the Sand; whose Folly lies in this, because his House, tho' as fair to the Eye as the other Man's, will do but little Service,

Service, and can be of but a very short and uncertain Continuance. For a while indeed, so long as the Sun shines clear, and the Air is still and calm, it may make a fair Shew, and be thought a commodious Habitation; but a little Change of Weather will soon discover it to be, as indeed it is, the Workmanship of a foolish Builder: When the *Rain descends*, and the *Floods come down*, and the *Winds blow hard* and *beat upon it*, it will certainly fall, and great will be the *Fall of it*; for it will not fall by Piece-meals, but all at once; and that which the Man design'd for his Shelter, will only help to contribute to his Ruin.

Such, our *Saviour* says, is the Man which builds his Hope of Heaven upon his holding or professing the true Faith, without a Life and Conversation suitable to it: He may please himself for a while with this flattering Hope; but the Time will certainly come, when he will find himself sadly disappointed. While the Sunshine of Prosperity lasts, and so long as he has nothing from without to disturb and disquiet him, it is possible he may also enjoy Peace within; because having his Mind wholly employ'd and taken up with the Cares or Pleasures of Life, he will not be at Leisure for sober serious thinking; and while he endeavours to live, as much as he can, without Thought, his Thoughts within him may not much trouble him. But this Calm will not last always; and whatever Accident shall ever force him upon Thinking, will likewise certainly put an End to his Peace and Security; and that Hope which made so goodly a Shew, and under which the Man shelter'd himself for a while, will then, like the House built upon the Sand, tumble down all at once, and oppress him with its Ruins. So far will he be then from being the better for such a Hope, that he will indeed be much the worse for it: The Unexpectedness of his Calamity will add a great Weight to it; and to have fallen from such Hopes will be a considerable Aggravation of the evil Estate he will then be plunged into. *Every one that heareth these Sayings of mine and doth them not, shall be likend unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell; and great was the Fall of it.*

The chief Subject therefore which these Words offer to our Consideration is the great Difference which there is between the Confidence of a speculative, and the good Hope of a practical Believer; between the Security of a formal Professor of Christianity, and the Satisfaction of Mind arising from the Testimony of the good Conscience of a Man who lives according to his Profession; between the Hope of an Hypocrite, and the Hope of the honest and sincere Christian; who herein *exercises* himself to *keep always a Conscience void of Offence, both towards God and towards Men*. The former of which is like an House built upon the Sand, easy to be thrown down by every Storm and Tempest: The latter, is like an House founded upon a Rock, which tho' it may be sometimes a little shaken by a Storm, yet is never hurt by it; because the Foundation it stands upon is immoveable.

And that we may the better discern the Difference which there is, in this Respect, between the Hope or rather the carnal Security of an hypocritical Professor, and the solid and rational Hope and good Assurance of a Man who lives up to his Profession, and has his *Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ*, it may be convenient to enquire a little more particularly, what our *Saviour* might probably here mean to signify by the *Rain*, and *Floods*, and *Winds*, which beating violently upon the *House* which was founded upon a *Rock*, did it no Harm; but which, when they did the same upon the House that without a Foundation was built upon the *Sand*, threw it down all at once, and turn'd that which before seem'd to be a well compact and beautiful Edifice into a Heap of Ruins.

And what most naturally answers to this Part of the Parable or Similitude, is any State or Condition of Life, any Accident or Occurrence, or Dispensation of Providence, whereby Trial is made of the Sincerity and Integrity of a Man's Heart, in such manner as the Strength of the Foundation of an House is tried by the Storms which beat violently upon it.

And there are, I think, four Things especially which we may well suppose were hereby intended to be signified, *viz.*

I. A State of *strong Temptation*.

II. Some fore and grievous *Affliction*.

III. The Approach of *Death*. And,

IV. The Day of *Judgment*.

When any of these Things come to us, they will make Trial of the Strength of the Foundation which our Hopes are built upon; they will make a clear Discovery to others, and to our selves also, what sort of Men we are: And however we might have flattered our selves before with a vain and false Opinion of our own Goodness, or of God's Favour and Affection towards us, we shall then be no longer able to cheat and deceive our selves. Such Storms as these, beating upon the House, will either settle it firmer upon its Foundation, if indeed its Foundation be solid and substantial; or else, in case the Foundation was not laid deep and strong enough to support such a Pile of Building, they will utterly ruin and destroy and dash to Pieces the Edifice which was rais'd thereupon.

I. I say, a State of *strong Temptation* is a pretty sure Trial of the Goodness of our Hope, and of the Strength or Weakness of the Foundation which it is built upon.

It is the blessed Lot of some, and, God be thanked, it has been ours, to be born in a Country where the Christian Religion is not only professed, but established and encouraged; where the Laws of *Christ*, are made a Part of the Law of the Land; where the strictest Observation of the Rules and Precepts of Christianity is the likeliest Way to promote our temporal Interests; where Religion and Virtue, or what carries a fair Shew and Appearance thereof, is the best Recommendation of a Man to Employments of Honour and Profit; and where, on the other Side, a Man can hardly transgress the Rules of his Religion very notoriously, in any Instance, without incurring publick Shame and Disgrace, or the Penalty of some human Law. Now when the Church of *Christ* is in this prosperous and flourishing Condition, it may well be expected that it should be much thronged and crowded; and that a great many, who have no true Fear of God or Sense of Religion in their Minds, should yet make an open Profession of that Religion, which, for the Time, is gainful and creditable, and forbear the Gratification of their carnal Lusts and Appetites, at least in such Instances, and in such Manner, as would procure them Disgrace, or expose them to Punishment. Little Difference, as to the outward Conversation, will then appear between the sincere and honest-hearted Christian, and the formal and hypocritical Professor: But as the former will be constant in all the Exercises of Religion, out of Duty and Conscience towards God; the latter will be no less so, out of regard to his own Reputation: As the former will strictly forbear all Acts of Injustice and Oppression, because he fears to do Wrong; so will the latter, because he fears they will ruin his Credit, or bring him to Punishment, or hinder him from making so much Gain as he might do, by the Protection and Encouragement of the Laws, in a fair and honest Way. And lastly, as the former will be sober and temperate, because he dares not do any Wickedness and sin against God; so will like-

wife the latter be, because the Vices of Intemperance would bring a Blot upon his Name, make him less valued and esteemed of, and consequently be an Hindrance to his worldly Advancement.

And this Likeness, as to outward Appearance, between the Conversation of the Hypocrite and of the truly religious Person, in such peaceful Times, and in such a flourishing State of Religion, may deceive not only the By-standers, who can judge only by outward Appearance; but even the Hypocrite himself; who, because he is such an one as can have no Blame laid on him by others, may therefore be apt to fancy that he is also such an one as God himself will approve. For why, may he think, should not he be as well accepted by God as any Man, who does as much to render himself accepted by God, as any other Man does? who is as constant at Church, at Prayers, at Sermons, at Sacraments, as any of his Neighbours are, whom yet both he and all who know them, believe to be very good Men; who is as square and just in all his Dealings as any Man; and never took any thing from his Neighbour by Fraud, Extortion, or Violence? and who is also nicely sober and temperate in the Use of Meats and Drinks, and bodily Pleasures, and cannot be charged to have exceeded, hardly at any Time, the Bounds of Temperance and Moderation? Thus, I say, the good Esteem which he finds he has among his Neighbours, for his unblameable Life and Conversation, may very easily beget in him a good Opinion of himself; he may believe himself as good as any are, when he finds he is generally as well thought of as the best Men can be; and yet all this while he may be in Truth no better than an Hypocrite; and if ever he should be put into a State of strong Temptation, it would then quickly appear, what a slight and slender Foundation his fond Opinion, and good Hope of himself was built upon.

Such an Hypocrite the Devil thought Job was, at least as such an one he slanderously represented him to Almighty God; and this Method of Trial, he made no doubt, would fully discover his Hypocrisy: If he had but as strong Temptation to be wicked, as he had Inducement to be good and virtuous, he made no Question but the Temptation would prevail. *Hast thou, says God, Job i. 8. considered my Servant Job? that there is none like him in the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man, one that feareth God, and escheweth Evil?* And then it follows, *Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast thou not made a Hedge about him, and about his House, and about all that he hath on every Side? Thou hast blessed the Work of his Hands, and his Substance is increased in the Land. But put forth thine Hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy Face.* But as confident as the Devil was of this, he found himself mistaken, when after having made use of all the Permission which God had given him to plague and torment him, the good Man still retained his Integrity. The Reason was, his Piety and Virtue were deep and well grounded; he did not do the Things which were good with an hypocritical Design to gain Credit and Reputation to himself, nor with a worldly Design to promote his temporal Interest, but out of a true Fear of God, and a lively Sense of his Obligation and Duty to him.

But the Case is quite otherwise with the formal and hypocritical Professors of Religion; their Religion, and the good Opinion of themselves, which they build upon it, being both grounded on a slight and sandy Foundation, will be all thrown down at once, whensoever they shall come to be assaulted by such strong and violent Temptations as that good Man was. He who is of the true Religion now, because it is the Religion of his Country, would as certainly have been of a false one, if it had been his Hap to have been born and bred in a Place where that was received; and if any other Religion should happen in his Time to be set up and established by Law, will then

like and approve of that, as much as he does now of this. And he who now duly and constantly frequents the Church, and seems to be a devout Worshipper of God, because it is not only safe but reputable so to be, would not dare to own and profess his Religion, if ever the Profession thereof should expose him to Danger and Persecution; but like the Man compared by our *Saviour* to the *Stony Ground*, in which the good Seed of the Word was never deep rooted, when *Tribulation or Persecution arise because of the Word*, he would *by and by be offended*: And he who in any other Instance is virtuous and honest, because he finds a present Gain and Advantage in being so; would quickly be quite otherwise if he saw a greater Gain in that; and if the *Devil* should ever offer him, as he did our *Saviour*, *the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them*, would readily comply with any Condition which they were offered upon, and make no Scruple to fall down and worship the *Devil* himself for such a glorious Reward.

It being therefore, as I said before, our happy Lot to be born in a *Christian* Country, and in peaceful Times, when Religion and Interest are both on a Side; and it being very difficult in such a State of Things for a Man to know his own Heart, and to be sure that worldly Honour or Gain have not a greater Influence upon his Conversation, than a Principle of sound Virtue and Religion; and it being also certain that, however other Men may be deceived in us, or we our selves may be mistaken in the Opinion we have of our selves, God, who searches the Heart, cannot be deceived or imposed upon by the closest Hypocrisy; it nearly concerns us to examine well our own Hearts, and to get the best Assurance we can, that we are sincere and upright in our Religion.

And the best Method, I think, which we can take to be secure of this, is, in the Examination of our selves, to have regard chiefly to our Thoughts, and the inward Actions of our Minds, and to our secret Behaviour, when we are sure no Eye sees us, nor can see us, but only God's; and if, upon Examination, we find as little to blame in our selves in our Thoughts, as we do in our Words and Actions; in our most secret, as we do in our most open Behaviour; we may then, I think, upon good Grounds, continue our Hope and Assurance towards God: We may by this be reasonably assured, that the Fear and Love of God are well and deeply rooted in our Hearts; and consequently, that if ever it should be his Pleasure to make Trial of our Faith and Obedience by the strongest Temptations, we should be able, by the Assistance of his Grace, to preserve our Innocence and Integrity, and to come off victorious. But,

II. Another Thing probably meant to be signified by our *Saviour* in this Parable or Similitude, by the *Rain*, and *Floods*, and *Wind*, which beat violently upon the House, and make a full Discovery whether it was built upon a solid, or upon a loose and sandy Foundation, is, any sore and grievous *Affliction*, or Calamity befalling us in this Life. For this is a main Difference between the Hope of a formal Professor of Religion, and that of a sincere *Christian*, of one who not only *hears these Sayings of Christ*, but sets himself diligently to the Practice of them. A formal Professor of Religion may have Hope, so long as he forbears thinking and considering seriously of his State and Condition; and this he may forbear to do, so long as the Sunshine of Prosperity lasts, so long as he lives in Ease, and at Peace, and has nothing to vex or disquiet him: But if at any Time the Hand of God be heavy upon him in Pain, in Sicknes, in Losses, in taking away from him his near and dear Relations, or in any other sore Affliction; this, of course, will make him grave, serious and thoughtful; and being so, his past Sins will readily come to his Remembrance; they will force themselves upon his Consideration, whether

whether he will or no, and then he will clearly see, what weak and sandy Foundations his former Hope, or rather Security, was built upon; his Sins will then stare him in the Face, and strike Terror into his Mind; and being conscious of his own Falseness and Hypocrisy in his former Professions of Religion, he will see the Hand of an angry God in every sad Accident which happens to him.

Thus it was with *Joseph's Brethren*, when out of Envy they had sold him into *Egypt*: A long Time they pleas'd themselves with the Thoughts that they were got well ridden of one who stole, as they thought, their Father's Affection from them, and was ever troubling them with telling them Dreams of his own Advancement and of their Subjection. And so long as Things went on as well with them as before, and their Flocks and their Herds multiplied, and their Father's Face was favourable towards them, whom they had made to believe that his Son *Joseph* had been devoured by wild Beasts; so long, I say, as their Prosperity lasted, they never seem to have so much as once reflected upon their Baseness and Barbarity to their Brother; but all that while, as the *Prophet* speaks, *Amos vi. 6. They drank Wine in Bowls, and anointed themselves with the chief Ointments, and were not grieved for the Affliction of Joseph.* But when the Scene of Affairs was changed, and being come into *Egypt* to buy Corn for the Support of themselves and Families, they were there clap'd up in Prison, as Spies, and had no other Prospect but of perishing there themselves, while their Father, and Wives and Children did the same at Home for Want of Bread; this roused them out of their Security, and awakened their Conscience, and brought their Sin to Remembrance. And they could not but then sadly reflect upon the just Judgment of God, whose Providence had now met with them, and meant, as they thought, to recompense them in Kind the Injury they had done their Brother. *They said then one to another, as you may see, Gen. xlii. 21. We are verily guilty concerning our Brother, in that we saw the Anguish of his Soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this Distress come upon us; therefore behold his Blood is now required.*

But the Case is quite otherwise with a sincerely good Man, who makes it his constant Endeavour to please God in every Thing; when any such Distress or Adversity happens to him. His Hope towards God being rational, and well grounded upon the Promises of God, and the Testimony of his own Conscience, which, after the strictest Examination, cannot charge him with the Allowance of himself in any known Sin; his Hope, I say, being thus grounded, will rather increase than be diminish'd by any Adversity which befalls him in this Life. The same Storm of Affliction which utterly overthrows the Hope of the Hypocrite, will but settle his rather faster upon its Foundation than it was before. His Affliction indeed will naturally put him upon considering and examining himself, and that it is but fit it should do; but having a clear Conscience and a guiltless Mind, the more he considers, and the stricter he examines himself, the less Cause will he have to faint under his Adversity, the more Reason will he have to hope in God's Goodness, and the more will he see of God's fatherly Kindness to him in his Affliction: So that what at first did a little daunt him, will quickly appear to him an easy Trial and Exercise of his Patience, and afterwards will become to him just Matter of Rejoycing; and tho' *the outward Man perish, the inward Man will be renewed Day by Day*, as the *Apostle* speaks; because he will consider that *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17.

Thus the Hope of a good Man, of a Man who is a *Doer of the Word*, and not an *Hearer only*, will, like an House built upon a Rock, stand it

out against the fiercest Storms, both of the greatest Temptations and of the sorest Afflictions; by either of which the Hope of the Hypocrite or formal Professor of Religion, like a House built upon the Sand, is easily thrown down and destroyed. But,

III. There is nothing which can happen to a Man in this World more certainly than *Death*, and there is nothing so certain to discover whether his Hopes are well or weakly grounded, as the near and visible Approach of Death; which therefore, we may well think, was another Thing especially meant by our *Saviour* in this Parable, by the *Rain, Floods* and *Winds* beating upon the two Houses here spoken of; against which, that which was built on the *Rock* stood firm and unshaken; and by which, the other which was built on the *Sand* was quickly thrown down, and utterly ruin'd.

For so indeed it is; however wicked Men may sooth and flatter up themselves with vain Hopes, while they are in Health and Strength, and have a Prospect before them of long Life, and are busy in the Pursuits of those Provisions or Enjoyments, which they think will make their Life here pleasant and delightful to them; when these Things draw to an End, and Death makes its near Approach, and looks them in the Face, just ready to seize upon them, this commonly opens their Eyes to see their Danger, and they have then, commonly, quite other Notions both of themselves and of every Thing else, than they used to have in the Time of their Health and Prosperity. When they shall see themselves going out of this World, it is a Question they will hardly be able to forbear asking themselves, what will become of them when they are gone from hence? And, unless they have sinned themselves out of all Sense of Religion, and are become perfect Atheists, it will be natural for them then, in order to the Resolution of this Question, first, to set themselves to consider what Account is given of a future State, both by natural, and revealed Religion; and what Methods are prescribed by both, for the avoiding the Misery, and obtaining the Happiness which are expected when this Life is over: And, after that, to look back upon their Life past, to see whether it has been such as the Promises of Happiness are made to; or whether it has not been such as God has threatened to punish with everlasting Vengeance in the other World. And a very little Time spent in the Consideration of these Things, will be sufficient so to destroy and utterly confound the false Hope of a formal and hypocritical Professor of Religion, that it will be impossible ever to revive it. For as it is said, *Job* viii. 11. *Can the Rush grow up without Mire? Can the Flag grow without Water? Whilst it is yet in its Greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other Herb. So are the Paths of all that forget God; and the Hypocrite's Hope shall perish: His Hope shall be cut off, and his Trust shall be a Spider's Web.* And we are told the same again, *Job* xxvii. 8. *What is the Hope of the Hypocrite when God taketh away his Soul? Will God hear his Cry, when Trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Nay, will he always call upon God? i. e.* Can he, when he is in this Trouble and Distress, so much as go to God, with any Hope of Succour, or Expectation of Comfort?

But it is not so with upright and good Men; this Storm, which clearly destroys the Hope of the Hypocrite, rather increases theirs, and gives them a fuller Assurance of God's Favour and Good-will, and of a blessed and glorious Immortality than ever they had before. For while they were living in the World, they knew themselves to be in a State of Trial, they saw themselves encompassed with various Temptations; and tho' they had happily conquered the former, yet, being conscious of their own Weakness, they could not but be in some Fear lest they should afterwards miscarry; so

that all the Assurance they could then have was only of their present Condition; the most they could have of the Future, was only a Hope that he who had begun a good Work in them, would go on and finish it. So that all the while they were living in the World, and like to live, they were in the Condition of a Mariner, who being to steer thro' a narrow Sea, full of Rocks and Shelves, both on this side and that, cannot be sure, after he has escaped one Rock, that he shall not split upon another. They could not therefore then have such Joy and Peace in their Minds, as a Mariner has when he has clearly escap'd all the Dangers of the Sea, and is just entering into a safe Harbour. But when Death approaches, and especially when it is very near, this then becomes their Case: If they look back, it is with Pleasure upon the Dangers they have escap'd; and if they look forward, it is with greater Pleasure still, to see themselves so near to *the Joy which is set before them*; being able then to say to God, as good *Hezekiah* did, when he lay, as he thought, upon his Death-bed; *Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which is good in thy Sight*; or with *St. Paul*; *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give in that Day, and to all those that love his Appearing*. They may then with better Confidence and more Assurance than ever, commit the keeping of their Souls to God in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator: They cannot reasonably then entertain the least Fear or Suspicion, that he, to whom they have cleaved, and whom they have faithfully serv'd all their Life long, will forsake them at their Death. And therefore it must needs be a great Comfort to them to consider, that they have but one Act more to do, but one short Trial more to undergo, after which they shall never more be in Danger of falling from the Grace and Favour of God. Thus, as the Scripture says, *The Wicked is driven away in his Wickedness; but the Righteous hath Hope in his Death. Mark the perfect Man, and behold the Upright, for the End of that Man is Peace*, Prov. xiv. 33. Psal. xxxvii. 37.

But it may possibly be, as I have already intimated, that a Man may have sinned himself out of all Sense of Religion, that he may be quite hardned thro' a Custom of Sinning; and it is not perhaps impossible that such a one should go out of the World as thoughtlessly and carelessly as he liv'd in it. And, on the other Side, it may also possibly be, that a good Man, who has no Sin to accuse himself of, but what he has heartily repented of and forsaken, none but what he has both begg'd and obtain'd God's Pardon for, may yet, when he comes to dye, have some Fear upon his Spirits, occasion'd either by the Nature of his Distemper, or by some mistaken Notion in Religion; so that he may not dye with altogether so good an Assurance of God's Favour as might be wish'd. And therefore I add, in the fourth and last Place,

IV. Another Thing, most probably, meant by our *Saviour* in this Parable, by the *Rain*, and *Floods*, and *Wind*, which beating upon an House do try the Strength of its Foundation; and that is the great and terrible Day of the Lord, the Day of *Judgment*.

And this is indeed the greatest Trial of all, and will fully discover to every Man's self and to the whole World, whether his Hopes were built upon a solid or a rotten Foundation: For when this terrible Day comes, it will dash together and shatter to pieces, and entirely throw down, never to be raised up again, the false Hope of the Hypocrite and formal Professor of Religion; but it will strengthen and bring to Perfection the Hope and Expecta-

tion of all sincerely good Men, whose Hope will then be turned into Fruition; and who will then receive the *End of their Faith, even the Salvation of their Souls*: When they shall hear that joyful Sentence from the Mouth of their Judge; *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, from the Foundation of the World*. It will be then past all Dispute, whose Hope was weakly, and whose was substantially grounded, when all *that have done Evil* (of what Faith, or Profession, or Denomination soever they were) *shall go away into everlasting Punishment, but the righteous into Life eternal*.

Having therefore now seen the Difference which there is between the Hope of an Hypocrite, or mere Professor of Religion, and that of a sincere and obedient Christian; that the one is like an House built upon the *Sand*, easily thrown down by every Tempest; the other like a House founded upon a *Rock*, which no *Rains*, or *Floods*, or *Winds*, can over-turn; a Hope which will carry us thro' all Temptations, will support us under all Afflictions, will give us Comfort at the Hour of Death, when all earthly Comforts fail; and at last, when God shall come to judge the World with Power and great Glory, will even then enable us to lift up our Heads with Joy, because our *Redemption draweth nigh*: What remains, but that by what has been said, we be incited to use our utmost Endeavour to obtain, as soon as is possible, this blessed Hope, without which we can neither live in Peace, nor dye with Comfort.

And how this is to be done we cannot be ignorant, being so plainly taught it by our *Saviour* himself, in the Text, as well as in the foregoing Verses. It is, in short, by diligently learning and carefully practising all those excellent Rules of good Living which he has taught us in his holy Gospel, and especially in this *Sermon of his upon the Mount*; which now, by God's Assistance, I have gone quite thro' with, and I hope have truly and rightly explain'd to you. For, says he, *whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock*.

Now the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing; that ye may abound in Hope thro' the Power of the Holy Ghost. And this for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.



DISCOURSE LXXXVII.

The Manner and Effects of our Saviour's Preaching.

(*****)

MATTH. VII. 28, 89.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine:

For he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.



THE *Evangelist* having in this and the two foregoing Chapters related a famous Sermon of our *Saviour*, (which from the Place where it was delivered, is called and known by the Name of his *Sermon on the Mount*;) proceeds, in the Words which I have now read to you, to give an Account what Effect it had upon the People who heard it. *It came to pass, when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine*; and then he gives the Reason of it; *for he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

Having therefore in several former Discourses explained to you, and endeavoured to press upon your Practice, those excellent Precepts and Rules of Life which are given by our *Saviour* in this Sermon to all his Disciples, I know not how I could better conclude my Discourses on this Subject, than by handling these Words; which, though not a Part of our *Saviour's* Sermon, have yet a plain Relation to it, and shewing in what Manner this Sermon was received by the Auditors at its first Delivery, may serve also to instruct us how we ought to be affected and influenced in the reading it.

Only whereas the *Evangelist* here first relates the Effect, *the People were astonished at his Doctrine*, and then the Cause, *for he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes*. I think it will be most proper, in my Discourse on these Words, to invert the Method, and to consider,

I. What it was which was singular and remarkable in the Doctrine and Preaching of our *Saviour*, which caused this Astonishment in the People who

who heard him; *he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.* And,

II. What was the Fruit and Effect which his Preaching had upon them; *they were astonished at his Doctrine.*

I. I shall consider what it was which was singular and remarkable in the Doctrine and Preaching of our *Saviour*, which caused this Astonishment in the People who heard him. *He taught them, says the Evangelist, as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

He taught them, says the Evangelist, not as the Scribes. Now the Scribes were the ordinary Teachers and Expounders of the Law among the *Jews*; who are therefore sometimes in Scripture called *Lawyers*, being reputed to be well learned in the Law, as having given themselves to the Study of it; and because these Scribes, or Lawyers, were at that Time most of them of the Sect of the *Pharisees*, they are sometimes called *Scribes and Pharisees*; and when the Words are so joined together, the same Persons, and not two Sorts of Men, are meant by both the Words; as in *Matth. xxiii. 2, 3. The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses Seat; i. e. as was said before, they are the authorized Guides and Teachers of the People out of the Law of Moses; all therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.*

The *Scribes* being therefore, I say, most of them of the Sect of the *Pharisees*, who, having little of the *Power of Godliness*, abounded in the *Form* and Shew of it, the chief Subjects which they commonly treated of in their Sermons and Discourses to the People, were the Rites and Ceremonies of the Law, about which they were indeed very nice and curious in their Decisions, determining, even to a Furlong, how far a Man might walk on the *Sabbath-Day*, without breaking the Rest of the Sabbath; and even to a Spire of Mint, or a Grain of Anise, what was punctually due for Tithes to the Priest; and the like in other Cases. And, as if the Law of *Moses* had not laid upon them a sufficient Number of Ceremonies, they invented, added and pressed upon the People several more, which they called the *Traditions of the Elders*, as about washing their Hands before and after Meat, about cleansing the Vessels which their Victuals were kept, or dressed, or served up in, and the like; neglecting in the mean Time, as our *Saviour* observes, either to practise themselves, or to teach to their People the Observation of the weightier Matters of the Law, *Judgment, Mercy and Faith.*

Or if at any Time they did preach upon these more useful Subjects, it was rather in order to teach Men how little they might do, than how much they were bound to do; their Business was not so much to press upon their People the great Duties of Piety, Justice and Charity, as to teach them Shifts, and Evasions, and Excuses, for their not doing them. Thus, as our *Saviour* observes, they made void, in great measure, the third Commandment, by teaching the little or no Obligation of some sorts of Oaths, *Matth. xxiii. 16, &c. Whosoever, said they, shall swear by the Temple, it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the Gold of the Temple, he is a Debtor—and whosoever shall swear by the Altar, it is nothing, but whosoever sweareth by the Gold that is upon the Altar, he is guilty.* And thus also, they taught Children, under a Pretence of Religion, to be undutiful and ungrateful to their Parents, thereby voiding in great measure, the Obligation of the fifth Commandment, as you may see, *Mark vii. 11. Full well, says our Saviour, ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own Tradition; for Moses said, Honour thy Father and thy Mother; and whosoever curseth Father or Mother, let him die the Death. But ye say, if a Man say to his Father or Mother, it is Corban,*

that is to say, *a Gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, he shall be free; and ye suffer him no more to do ought for his Father or his Mother.*

Or if they did, as doubtless some of them did, teach well, yet they taught not with Authority and Power; they preached only as wise Men, as Men who, by giving themselves to the Study of the Law, had attained to good Skill in the Interpretation of it; but they did not pretend to such immediate Inspiration and Mission as the Prophets had. Their Stile was not like that of the ancient Prophets, *Thus saith the Lord*, but thus, and thus, *saith Moses*, *saith the Law*, *say the Elders*, *say the Scribes*: They pretended not to any Authority of their own, but thought it enough if they could confirm what they said by the Authority of others.

And I do not mention this last as a Thing wherein the *Scribes* were to be blamed; *viz.* for not pretending to an Authority which indeed they had not; but only barely to shew the Difference which was between their Teaching and our *Saviour's*. For neither does the *Evangelist* himself here pass any Censure, much less does he cast any Blame upon the *Scribes*, for this their Way and Manner of Teaching; he only observes in general, and relates it as a Matter of Fact, that their Teaching was not like our *Saviour's*, or that his Preaching was in some respects remarkably different from theirs; *he taught with Authority, and not as the Scribes*. But, most certainly, for whatever other Things they were to blame, they were not to blame for this, *i. e.* for not teaching with such Authority as he did, for not assuming to themselves a greater Authority than God had given them, for not saying that the Lord had sent them, when in Truth the Lord had not sent them, any other Way, than as he now sends Ministers to his Church, *viz.* by a stated Power lodged in the Governors of his Church, to chuse and appoint, according to the best of their Judgment, proper Persons to instruct the People in their Duty. They therefore having no more Authority than is common to the ordinary Guides of Religion, it was not a Fault in them that they pretended to no more. However, whether it was a Fault or no, that they *taught not with Authority*, or whether or no their Doctrine or Way of Teaching was in any other respect blameable, does not properly lie before us now to examine; but all that needs to be observed upon this Occasion, is only barely the Difference between our *Saviour's* Teaching and theirs, which consisted, as I suppose, chiefly in these three Things; 1. in the Matter of his Doctrine; 2. in the Manner of his teaching it; and, 3. in the Proofs which he gave of his Authority to teach in such manner as he did.

1. In the Matter of his Doctrine. For the *Scribes*, as I noted before, in their Sermons and Discourses to the People, insisted chiefly on Matters of Rite and Ceremony; but our *Saviour's* Doctrine was quite of another Sort. He did not indeed preach against the Use of those Ceremonies which were appointed by *Moses*; nay, on the contrary, he declared, as you may see, *Matth. v. 17, 18.* that he was *not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets*, and that *not one jot or Tittle should pass from the Law, till all were fulfilled, i. e.* that even the Ceremonial Law, though it was only Typical, and a Shadow of Things to come, was nevertheless to continue in Force till it was all fulfilled, *i. e.* till all those Things were come to pass, which were prophetically denoted by those Types. And to shew that even this Part of the Law was not as yet abolished, he himself most carefully and punctually observed it, and, as Occasion was offered, directed the People also to observe it. Particularly, when by the Word of his Power he had made clean any Lepers, he always directed them to go and shew themselves to the Priest, *Matth. viii. 4. Mark i. 44.* and to make

make that Offering for their Cleansing which the Law of *Moses* had commanded. But tho' he himself did not teach that this Part of the Law was abolished; he knew that the Time was very near wherein it was to be abolished; he knew that when all those Things were come to pass which were prefigured by those Types, the typical Law being thereby fulfilled, would forthwith expire, and be no longer obliging; and therefore he never, unless it was only occasionally, and in Instances that were presently to take place, urg'd the Observation of it. In all this long Sermon, which takes up three whole Chapters, here is not one Word concerning Rites and Ceremonies, but his whole Discourse is concerning the moral and substantial Duties of Piety, Justice and Mercy. And it is not unlikely that this might be a main Cause of the People's Admiration, *viz.* because they had not been much used to such kind of Discourses; because the Subjects which he treated of were such as they had rarely known treated of by the *Scribes*.

2. Another Difference between our Saviour's Teaching and theirs, was in the Manner of it; *he taught, says the Evangelist, as one having Authority, and, in that Respect, not as the Scribes.* They, it seems, did not teach as having Authority, at least not such Authority as that wherewith he seem'd to teach.

Not but that they also had Authority to teach; *i. e.* to expound the Law of *Moses*, and to press the Observation of it: Our Saviour himself grants, in the Place before cited, that they did *sit in Moses's Seat; i. e.* where the authoris'd Teachers of the Law, and Guides of the People. But then they only explain'd the Law, they did not give it; and even that Authority which they had to explain it, was derived to them only by their being design'd and appointed to that Office by the Governors of the Church, not by special and immediate Designation and Appointment of God, such as the Authority of *Moses*, and the other antient and inspir'd Prophets was grounded upon. They spake not therefore as from themselves, but for the Law it self, they cited *Moses* and the *Prophets*; and for the Explication which they gave of it, they cited the Sayings and Authority of wise Men who had liv'd in former Times: They interpreted it not merely according to their own Judgment, but according to the *Tradition of the Elders*.

But now our Saviour's Preaching was quite after another Manner; he spake not as an Expounder of the Law, but as a Law-giver, and not as by an Authority which was derived to him from another, but as by an Authority which was inherent in himself; so that in this Respect his Teaching differ'd not only from that of the *Scribes*, but likewise from that of the antient inspir'd *Prophets*, and even of *Moses* himself. For the *Scribes* in their Exposition of the Law, urg'd the Interpretation which they gave of it, as deliver'd down to them by Tradition from the *Fathers*; and the Style of the antient inspir'd *Prophets* was, *Thus and thus saith the Lord*: And even *Moses* himself never pretended that any of those Laws which he gave to the *Children of Israel* were his own, or were bound upon them by his Authority, as supreme Magistrate and sole Legislator; but he always own'd that they were only such as God spake to him, and commanded him to give in his Name to the People: And, as the *Author* to the *Hebrews* says, *Heb. iii. 5. Moses verily was faithful in all his House, as a Servant; i. e.* he deliver'd faithfully all the Messages of God to the People: But then he adds, that *Christ was faithful as a Son over his own House*. And that was indeed the Case; for he gave Laws to his Disciples, as by his own Authority; as in his own Right, as their Lord and Master, and not only as a Messenger from God. Several Instances of which we have in this very *Sermon on the Mount*; *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old Time, thus and thus;* but

but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his Brother without a Cause, shall be in Danger of the Judgment. I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a Woman to lust after her, hath committed Adultery with her already in his Heart. I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his Wife, saving for the Cause of Fornication, causeth her to commit Adultery. I say unto you, Swear not at all. I say unto you, that ye resist not Evil. I say unto you, love your Enemies, &c. Matth. v. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44. Thus our Saviour taught as one having Authority, i. e. as having Power and Right to command Obedience to his Precepts. And this was the second Difference which I noted between his Teaching and the Scribes; viz. in the Manner of it.

3. Another Difference which I noted between his Teaching and theirs, was in the Proof that he gave of his Authority to teach in such Manner as he did.

The Authority which the Scribes had to teach being only by human Designation and Appointment, all the Proof they could give, or that it could be expected they should give, of their Authority, was the producing and shewing the Commission which they had from the Governors of the Church to exercise this Office: And so long as their Doctrine was grounded upon the Law, and was in all Points agreeable to it, the Production of such a Commission was a sufficient Proof of their Authority, and a good Reason enough to engage the People to hearken to them; according to those Words of our Saviour before cited; *the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses Seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* But it was necessary that our Saviour, who pretended to an higher Authority, should likewise give better Proof, or at least another Sort of Proof, of the Authority by which, or with which he taught; it was necessary that he, who in his Teaching assumed the Title, and used the Style of a Law-giver, I say unto you, should shew that he had Authority to make and to give Laws.

And this indeed he had fully done before he began this Sermon, and the same he continued to do, all the Time of his Preaching. He had, I say, fully done it; even before he began this Sermon; he had given full Proof of his divine Authority, by the publick Exercise of a divine Power, by doing such wonderful Works as could not be done by any Power less than God's; as you may see at the latter End of the fourth Chapter; *Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all Manner of Sickness, and all Manner of Disease among the People: And his Fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto him all sick People, that were taken with diverse Diseases and Torments, and those which were possess'd with Devils, and those which were Lunatick, and those that had the Palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great Multitudes of People from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan;* Matth. iv. 23, 24, 25. And then it follows, at the Beginning of the fifth Chapter; *and seeing the Multitudes he went up into a Mountain, and open'd his Mouth and taught them, saying; Blessed are the poor in Spirit, &c.*

Thus our Saviour taught not as did the Scribes: For the Matter of his Doctrine was more excellent than theirs; and he taught with greater Authority than they did, or could do; and he gave as good Proof of his Authority as could reasonably be desired. All which together had this Effect upon the People who heard him, that it made them *astonished at his Doctrine*: and this was the other Point I was to consider, viz.

II. What was the Fruit and Effect which his Preaching, and particularly this his Sermon upon the Mount, had upon the People who heard it; it came

to pass when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine.

They were astonished at his Doctrine; that is,

1. They were taken with Admiration of the Excellency of his Doctrine, which they themselves could not but discern was much more pure and spiritual than they had been used to hear from the Instruction of their Scribes.

2. They were also stricken with great Admiration of his Person, whose Education they had known, and that he had not been bred up to Learning. Thus we read, *Luke iv. 22. They all bare him Witness, and wonder'd at the gracious Words which proceeded out of his Mouth; and they said, Is not this Joseph's Son?* And at another Time, *John vii. 15. The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this Man Letters, having never learn'd?*

3. They wonder'd likewise very much at the miraculous Works which had been done by his Hands, being such as they had never seen done before, and had as little Reason, as they thought, to expect from him as from any one, *Mark vi. 2, 3. Many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this Man these Things? And what Wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty Works are wrought by his Hands? Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, the Brother of James and Joses, and of Judas and Simon? And are not his Sisters here with us?* And,

4. Lastly, this Admiration of his Doctrine, and of his Person, and of his mighty Works, had likewise this farther Effect upon them, that it inclin'd them to think him an extraordinary Prophet, a Person divinely inspir'd, and specially sent by God as the antient Prophets had been. Thus we read, *Luke vii. 16. that after the Miracle which our Saviour had shewed in raising up from the Dead the Widow's Son at Nain; there came a Fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, That a great Prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his People.* But some went farther still, and seem to have been perswaded that he was that great and extraordinary Person, who had many Ages before been fore-spoken of by the Prophets; *John vi. 14. Then those Men when they had seen the Miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a Truth that Prophet that should come into the World.* And some went farther yet, and were inclin'd to own him to be the Christ. Thus we read, *John iv. 29. That the Woman of Samaria, after some Discourse which she had had with him, went her Way into the City, and said to the Men, Come, see a Man which told me all Things, that ever I did; Is not this the Christ?* And of others we read, *John vii. 31. Many of the People believed on him and said, when Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man hath done?*

And now, having shewn you what Effect this Sermon had upon those who first heard it, I shall proceed to shew what Effect it ought to have upon us who read it. And this will be both a proper Inference from the foregoing Discourse, and likewise a suitable Conclusion to all the Discourses which I have made upon this Sermon.

Now they who heard this Sermon, the Evangelist says, were astonish'd at his Doctrine, because he taught them as one having Authority, i. e. he seem'd to them to assume an Authority, beyond what other Men, beyond what the Scribes had done, but whether warrantably or not, they could not certainly tell. This, however, was enough to raise their Astonishment and Admiration, tho' not enough to oblige them to a prompt and ready Obedience. But we are well assur'd, we all profess that we firmly believe that he had all that Authority which the People then only suspected, or, at most, only thought it probable he might have; on us therefore his Discourses and Preaching, and this Sermon of his in particular, ought to have an Effect

different from what it had upon them: And it is not enough for us to admire it, but we ought also in Reason to set our selves, with all Readiness of Mind, and with the greatest Diligence of Endeavour, to the Practice of those good Rules of Living which he here prescribes.

I say, whereas they only suspected, or at most only thought it probable that he had some Authority more than ordinary; being induced to think so from his peculiar Way and Manner of Teaching, we know what that Authority was by which he spake, and we know that it was the highest Authority in Heaven or Earth, and that to which all created Beings, not Men only, but the highest Angels too, are bound to yield Obedience; this, I say, we know and are well assured of, from as good Evidence as could in reason be desired. For,

We know, by the clear and full Accomplishment of all the ancient Prophecies in him, which had foretold and described the *Messias*, that he was that Prophet foretold by *Moses*, in *Deut. xviii. 18.* *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your Brethren, like unto me, him shall ye hear in all Things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every Soul which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the People,* *Acts iii. 22. vii. 37.*

We are assured, from the well attested History of his Miracles and mighty Works, that God was with him, and that the Power of God was in him. *The Works that the Father gave him to finish, the same Works that he did, bare Witness of him, that the Father sent him,* *John v. 36.* We cannot therefore but conclude, as *Nicodemus* did, *John iii. 2.* (and we have greater Reason to conclude so than *Nicodemus* then had, who had seen or heard of but very few in Comparison of those mighty Works which we are assured were done by him) that he was a Teacher come from God, because no Man could do those Miracles which he did, except God was with him.

But above all, his Resurrection from the Dead, by which God did set his Seal to the Truth of his Testimony, and did with great Power declare him to be his own Son, is the clearest Evidence of his divine Authority; by this we are assured that he had Authority not only to make Laws, but likewise to give Judgment upon us according to them, according to that of the *Apostle*, *Acts xvii. 31.* *He hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.*

By these Evidences, I say, we are fully assured, and upon these we declare our firm Belief that he was the Son of God, the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person, and upholding all Things by the Word of his Power, as the *Apostle* speaks, *Heb. i. 3.* By these Evidences we are assured, that it was the Word that was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and discoursed with us, even that eternal Word of whom the *Apostle* says, *John i. 1, &c.* *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the same was in the Beginning with God. All Things were made by him, and without him was not any Thing made that was made.* So that consequently we do as truly hear God himself speaking to us in this Sermon of our Saviour upon the Mount, and in all his other Sermons and Discourses, as recorded by the holy Evangelists, as the Jews did when they heard the Ten Commandments uttered from Mount Sinai, by the Voice of God himself, or an Angel personating and representing him. And well might he assume the Title, and use the Stile of a Law-giver, *I say unto you*, when he delivered to us these Precepts, who was indeed, as the *Apostle* stiles him, *God manifest in the Flesh,* *1 Tim. iii. 16.*

Being therefore thus persuaded of the divine Mission of our Saviour, that he was truly a Teacher sent from God; or rather, being thus persuaded of his own divine and sovereign Authority, as he was the Son of God, *whom he hath appointed Heir of all Things, by whom also he made the Worlds, who being the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person, and upholding all Things by the Word of his Power, when he had by himself purged our Sins, sat down on the right Hand of the Majesty on high,* Heb. i. 2, 3. being, I say, thus persuaded, as I hope we all are, of the Divinity of our Saviour, it plainly follows, in the second Place,

2. That this Discourse or Sermon of his ought to have another Effect upon us, than it had upon those who first heard it, *i. e.* that we ought not only to admire the Wisdom of it, but to let our selves with all Readiness and Diligence to obey it. Being persuaded, that the Authority which he spake with is such as we ought to obey, we shall be self-condemned if we do not yield Obedience to it; and the Sentence which in that Case we must pass upon our selves, is the very same which he the Judge of all will also pass upon us at the last Day; as he tells us, *Luke vi. 46. Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the Things which I say?* And to the same Purpose he had said at the twenty first Verse of this Chapter: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.* And again, at the twenty fourth and twenty sixth Verses: *Therefore, whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock—and every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.*

See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh, Heb. xii. 25. for he himself hath told us, that he that receiveth him, receiveth him that sent him, *Mat. x. 40.* and that he that despiseth him, despiseth him that sent him, *John xiii. 20.* And if they escaped not who refused him that spake on Earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven, *Luke x. 16.* He that despised Moses his Law died without Mercy, Heb. xii. 25. Of how much sorer Punishment then shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God? Heb. x. 28, 29.

I conclude all therefore with those other Words of the Author to the Hebrews, Heb. ii. 1, &c. *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest Heed to the Things which we have heard, lest at any Time we should let them slip. For if the Word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience received a just Recompence of Reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them Witness, both with Signs and Wonders, and with diverse Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will,* Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, thro' the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his Sight, thro' Jesus Christ; to whom be Glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE LXXXVIII.

The Sufficiency of a standing Revelation.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



THESE Words contain some of the Discourse that passed between *Abraham* in Heaven, and a certain *rich Man* in Hell; occasion'd by a Request which he had made in the foregoing Verses, in the Behalf of his *five Brethren* whom he had left alive upon Earth; that *Abraham* would be so kind as to send *Lazarus* to them, to testify to them, lest they also should come into that Place of Torment. And the general Design of them, and indeed of the whole Parable of which they are a Part, is to assert the Sufficiency of those Means which God hath thought fit to use to bring Men to Repentance, particularly by granting them a *standing Revelation* of his Will; and the probable Unsuccessfulness of any other Method that we could propose, and perhaps might think more proper for this Purpose.

And when these Words were first spoken, it was with a special Reference to the State of the *Jews*, and to that Light, and those Means of Salvation which were afforded to them, at the Time when our *Saviour* began his Preaching; when all the *standing Revelation* of God's Will was contained in the Books of *Moses*, and in the Writings of the *Prophets*.

But since then our *Lord Jesus Christ*, the eternal Son of God, a more credible Messenger than *Lazarus* from the Dead, has come himself in Person, to assure us that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and to shew us the Means

of attaining that, and avoiding this; and God having raised him up from the Dead, after he had been crucified by the Jews, has given *sufficient* Assurance to the World of his divine Mission; and that *Jesus* did and said such Things, and that he died and rose again, we have the Testimony of his *Apostles*, and others, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses thereof, and who in Confirmation of their Testimony were empowered by God to do as great Miracles as *Jesus* himself had done: And lastly, of what was done and taught by our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, we have very credible Records still remaining, *viz.* the Books of the *New Testament*; the Authority of which is at least as well proved to us, as ever the Authority of the *Old Testament* was to the *Jews*: So that we now have plainly more and stronger Motives to Repentance, than the *Jews* before our *Saviour's* Time had; we consequently do stand in less Need of *new Miracles* and *new Revelations* than they did; and therefore the Argument in the Text, as it may be applied to us who live now, is much stronger than as it was here urged by *Abraham* with Reference to the *Jews*, while they had only *Moses* and the *Prophets*.

And thus in my Discourse upon the Words, I shall now consider it, *viz.* as if the Request made by the *rich Man* in the Behalf of his Brethren, in the two foregoing Verses, were made now in the Behalf of those to whom the Revelation of the *Gospel* has been given, but without Success; and as if the Answer here returned to it by *Abraham*, had been suited to the present State of Things.

And from the Words, thus largely understood, I shall take Occasion to speak to these three Points.

I. I shall endeavour to shew, that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets*, (I add, they have also *Christ*, and his *Apostles*;) *let them hear them*.

II. I shall shew, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreasonable Request* to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, that in case God should condescend to gratify Men in this unreasonable Desire, working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it, it is *highly probable*, that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and *standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, would be persuaded by this Means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets* (nor *Christ* and his *Apostles*) *neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew, that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets*, (*Christ* and his *Apostles*) *let them hear them*.

And, I think, that if the *standing Revelation* which God hath made of his Will in the *Holy Scriptures*, can upon any Account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be upon one of these two Accounts; *viz.* either, 1. Because no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose; or, 2. Because there are some particular *Defects* in that *standing Revelation*

which we have in the *Holy Scripture*, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as it is possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

1. It may be pretended, that no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose: I am now therefore to enquire, with what Reason this can be pretended.

And in speaking to this Point, it does not lie upon me to prove, that God could not reveal his Mind afresh to every Man in every Age of the World, if he so pleased; for there is no question, but that the same God *who in diverse Manners spake in Times past to our Fathers by the Prophets*, could, if he pleased, speak to every one of us their Children, in such Manner as he then spake to the *Prophets* themselves; so that we might be all immediately *taught of God* as they were. But every Thing that may be done is not expedient to be done; and whether this Method would be expedient or not, will be hereafter enquired.

Neither does it now lie upon me to prove, that this Way which God hath thought fit to take to instruct the greatest Part of the World, *viz.* by a *standing Revelation*, is the best Way, and the most like to be effectual of any that could be used. Of this I shall likewise have Occasion to speak somewhat hereafter.

But what lies upon me at present to make good, is only this, that a *standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men.

And if there be any Ground for the contrary Pretence, I think it must be either, 1. Because all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot *at once* be committed to *Writing*: Or, 2. Because there cannot be *sufficient Evidence* given to satisfy a rational Man, that any Writing that is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so.

1. It may be said, that all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot be *at once* committed to *Writing*: Because every Age of the World produces new Opinions, which whether they be erroneous or not, cannot be judged by a *Criterion* that was given many Ages before these Opinions were broached: And as the World grows older in Years, it likewise improves in Wickedness, which cannot be restrained and suppressed by an old Law which was made before several Instances of those Wickednesses that are now practised were either known or thought of. And if it were not so, what need would there be of such a Number of Books as are written in every Age, to direct Men how to distinguish between Truth and Error, and what Opinions to fix upon in that great Variety of Opinions that are offered to them? Or what Need would there be of so many new Laws, as are daily made, in every Commonwealth, to restrain the growing Extravagancies of Mankind, and to keep them within due Bounds? So that if there be any Necessity at all of divine Revelation, to teach Men the Belief of Truth and the Practice of Righteousness, it is necessary that there should be a new and fresh Revelation made, at least as often as any new Error is broached, or any new Piece of Villany is practised in the World.

But to this Objection against the *Sufficiency* of a *standing Revelation*, I suppose a full Answer will be given in these two Particulars.

(1.) That there is no arguing from the Wisdom and Power of Men, to the Wisdom and Power of God. It may be granted to be impossible for a Man to write such a Book as shall be *sufficient* to confute all the Errors that can possibly at any Time afterwards spring up; or to compile such a Body of Laws as shall be *sufficient* to prevent or punish all future Crimes: But what is impossible with Men, may be possible with God; who has a perfect Foresight of all the Errors that will ever be broached, and of all the Wickedness that will ever be practised by Men to the End of the World. To a

Being

Being of infinite Wisdom and Knowledge it may be not only possible, but very easy so to contrive a Revelation, designed by him for the Direction of future Ages, that no Addition shall ever after need to be made to it. Nay indeed,

(2.) The Thing it self, that is, that a *standing Revelation* should be thus perfect; that it should be so contrived at once, and at first, as to be *sufficient* to answer all the Ends of a divine Revelation as long as the World shall last, is not very hard to be conceived.

For tho' Error be infinite, Truth, at least all Truth necessary to be believed, is finite and limited; and after a divine Revelation is once given, no more is necessary to be believed in after Ages than was at first; nor will there ever be more Things necessary to be believed to the End of the World, unless God shall please to add some new Revelation to the former. And this Revelation of all necessary Truth once made, being given to Men that are endued with Reason, nothing more is, or ever will be needful for the Discovery and Confutation of all Errors that can possibly spring up in after Ages, but only a right understanding of the Truths already delivered, and a right Use of Reason in making Inferences, and drawing Consequences therefrom. And this is all that is pretended to by the Books of Controversy that are written in every Age: The Design of them is not to declare new Truths, or to establish new Articles of Faith, but only to shew that those Opinions which they represent as false and erroneous, are either in themselves, or in their true Consequences, contrary to some Maxims that are already received as true.

And it is no less easy to conceive, that a *standing Revelation* may be at once so contrived as to be for ever *sufficient* to direct Men in all Points of *Practice*: Because although it is possible that every Age may afford new Instances of Wickedness, yet the Law that they are all Transgressions of, may be but one. And the Rule once given is a perpetual Direction, not only what to do, but likewise what to avoid; and this, as well in those Instances of Wickedness which may be invented afterwards, as in those which were in Practice before the Rule was made. For he that giving Direction to a Traveller in his Way, bids him *keep strait forward*, shall not need, if he speaks to a Man of Reason, to tell him, over and above, that he must be careful to avoid all Turnings to the right Hand or to the left; and much less shall he need to give him a particular Account of every Turning that he is to avoid. And tho' in Time to come there should be more By-ways and Turnings out of the Road than there are at present, yet the same one Direction, *to keep strait forward*, will be as full and as sufficient a Direction then, as it is now.

And the Necessity that human Law-givers find themselves under to be every Day repealing former Laws and adding new ones, is not caused by an absolute Impossibility of making at once such a Body of Laws as might be *sufficient* for all After-times; but arises, as I suppose, partly from the *Nature* of *human Laws*, which are, for the most Part, *negative* and *prohibitive* only; and by such a Law nothing is rendred unlawful but what is named; and to name at once every Thing that is then, or may be in all After-ages needful to be prohibited, would indeed be a Work of very great Difficulty; partly, from the *Nature* of that *Obedience* that is due to a mere human Law, which is only an *external* Obedience, and to the *Letter* of the Law; and that indeed must needs be a Law, or a Body of Laws of a prodigious Bulk, and very difficult to be contrived at once, which in the *Letter* thereof shall comprehend and give Direction concerning every Action, and every Mode of Action that are necessary to be done or forborn, in order to the preserving Justice and Peace among Men; partly, from the *little Regard* that Men generally

generally, have to the good of *Posterity*, which makes them only careful to contrive such Orders and Constitutions, as they hope will suffice to preserve Peace in their own Time, leaving it to those that come after, to take the like Care for themselves in their Times; partly, from the *Weakness* and *Ignorance* of the wisest of Men, who not understanding exactly the *Tempers* of all their Subjects, cannot know certainly what *Effect* their Laws will have, till after they have been for some Time experienced; and partly, from the unexpected *Difficulty* that is sometimes met with in the *Execution* of a Law, which may make it necessary afterwards to enforce it with a greater Penalty, or to take some farther Care than at first was thought needful, to see it executed.

But none of these Reasons of the Necessity of new Laws among Men are of any Force to shew that it is also necessary that God should be every Day making new Declarations of his Will, and that no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for all Times; for the *Laws* of God are *positive* and *commanding*, enjoining the truest and heartiest Love both to God and Men, and every natural and proper Expression thereof, and by consequence prohibiting every Affection of Mind, and every outward Act that is contrary thereto, whether it be expressly named or not; and the *Obedience* that we owe to a divine Law, is the Obedience of the *Heart* and of the whole inner Man, such as looks beyond the Letter to the *Design* and *Intention* of the Law, and avoids as carefully whatsoever is contrary to the Reason of the Law, as if it had been forbidden in the most express Words: And God being King *for ever and ever*, has the same Relation to all Men in *all Ages*, and cannot but be supposed to design the good Government of his Subjects in after, as well as in former Times; and he also *understanding* fully the *Tempers* of all his Subjects, *knows* beforehand what *Effect* the Laws he gives them will have, and can never be disappointed in his Expectation; and so can never be oblig'd to repeal or alter any of his Laws, by an un-foreseen Experience, that they are not so convenient, or so effectual as he thought they would be; and lastly, he, having all *Power* in his Hands, and a *sovereign* and *uncontrollable Dominion* over all, can appoint what Penalty he pleases to the Transgression of his Laws; can at any time convict Transgressors by his own unerring Knowledge only, and the Testimony of their guilty Consciences, without other Witnesses; and has it in his own single Power, without any Help of others, to execute, whenever he will, whatever Penalty he threatens.

Thus, I think, it appears that a *standing Revelation* may be so well contrived, as to be *sufficient* for all Times; that all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times may be at once committed to Writing.

2. But secondly, tho' this be granted, it may be still farther objected against the *Sufficiency* of a *standing Revelation*, that it can hardly be *sufficiently attested*; that there cannot be *sufficient Evidence* given to satisfy a rational Man, that any such Writing, which is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so; and that, (1.) Because there is no Way, but *Eye-witness*, to be *sufficiently assured* that any *Book* was written by the Person who is said to be the *Author* of it; (2.) Because there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently assured*, that the *Author* of such a *Book* did not design to *impose* upon his Readers; And, (3.) Because no Man can be *sure*, that he himself was not *deceived* in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to him; or in the Truth of any other Matter which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

(1.) It may be said, that there is no Way but *Eye-witness* to be *sufficiently assured* that any *Book* was written by the Person that is said to be the *Author* of it.

But that is very strange, that there should be no other Way to be *sufficiently assured* of the *Author* of any *Book*, and yet that there are a great many Books in the World, antient as well as modern, the Authors whereof were never in the least doubted of; who yet, I suppose, did not use to call together a Company of Men to stand by, and see them write those Books, which they intended to publish.

It seems then, that either there may be, besides Eye-witness, *sufficient Reason* to believe that a Book was written by the Person under whose Name it goes; or else that all the World has been extremely credulous in receiving an infinite Number of Books as written by such and such Authors, without *sufficient Assurance* thereof. But I believe the Truth is, there are some Men who for Reasons best known to themselves, but which may, some of them, be easily enough guessed at, will not allow that to be *sufficient Evidence* that a Book was written by a *Prophet* or an *Apostle*, which they must and do allow to be *sufficient Evidence* in any other Case of the like Nature.

For in other Cases we make no Doubt to receive a Book as written by such an Author, if he *owns* himself to be the Author of it; or if it be shewn written with his *own Hand*; or if they that are the *Publishers* of it, *declare* that they had it from him, as his own; or that they transcribed or printed it from a *Copy* which they *knew* to be of his *Hand-writing*; or if it passes current in common *Fame* and *Report* to be his, and his most intimate *Friends* believe it so, and he *himself* does not disown it, and there be none else that pretend any *Claim* or *Title* to it. Where these or most of these Circumstances do concur, we never doubt but that the Person said to be the Author of such a Book, is so indeed; unless there be some very clear Reason, grounded upon the known *Incapacity* of the Person to write in such a Language, in such a Stile, concerning such a Subject, or the like, whereby it may be demonstrated, that (whoever was) *he* could not be the Author of it. The Truth is, now a-days, and I suppose the Case was much the same formerly, whoever is the true Author of any Book, finds very little Difficulty to make Men believe that the Book is his; the greatest Difficulty is for a Man to conceal himself, in case he be not willing to be known to be the Author of it.

And when once a Book is generally received as written by such a Person, when, I say, it is thus received, in that Age in which it was first published, and by those that were in the best Capacity to enquire and to judge who was the true Author of it; they that live in After-times never think it reasonable to question the Authority thereof, unless there be evidently something, either in the Language, Dialect or Stile, or else in the Matter of the Book, as in the Relation of some Piece of History, the References to some ancient Customs, the Citations out of other Authors, or the like; by which it may be clearly made out, that the Book cannot be of such Antiquity as it pretends to, or could not be the Writing of that Person, who is reported, and has been commonly taken to be the Author of it.

Upon such Reasons as these, a great many Books are every Day received as written by such and such Authors; and though we cannot be so sure of a Thing that we believe upon these Inducements, as we are of what we see with our own Eyes; yet such Reasons as these are by the general Consent of Mankind judged to be *sufficient*, in a Matter of this Nature, which is hardly capable of better Proof. And for a Man to disallow in one Case that same Evidence of the Truth of a Matter of Fact, which in other Cases of the like Kind he allows to be *sufficient*; for a Man to receive a Book as written by another Person, and not to receive a Book as written by a *Prophet* or an *Apostle*, when he has as much Reason to receive one as the other, and no more Reason to reject one than the other, is not Judgment;

or Discretion, or reasonable Caution, but manifest Prejudice and Partiality. But,

(2.) It was farther said, That though we might be well enough assured that a Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently assured* that he who was the Author of it did not design to *impose upon his Readers*.

It seems then, there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently satisfied* that any Man is an *honest* Man, and fit to be credited; that he does not lye in every Thing he says, and intend a Cheat in every Thing he does. For if a Man may be believed in what he says, he may as well be believed in what he writes; and if he may be trusted in one Concern, he may as safely be trusted in another, unless good Reason can be shewed to the contrary.

But in judging of human Nature in general, Men commonly judge of others by themselves: What they are inclined to, they think is the Inclination of Mankind; what they allow themselves in, they think others, whatever they may pretend, make as little Scruple of as they do; what they freely practise, they make no Doubt other Men would practise as freely, on the same Occasions, and upon the same Inducements; so that when any Man is so very suspicious of the Honesty and Veracity of other Men, it gives but too just Ground to think that the Reason of his Aptness to distrust all others, is his Consciousness of his own evil Designs, and of the little Regard that he himself has to Truth in his own Assertions. And if those he has to deal with should refuse to give any Credit to any Thing that he affirms, because, according to his own declared Opinion, very little Credit can reasonably be given to the Report and Affirmation of others, I do not see, with what Reason he can blame them for so doing.

Not but that, after all, it is possible that a Man may, (it is doubtless what has been done by some) give out a Report, or write a Book on Purpose to deceive Mankind; but nevertheless, I say, that it ought not without very good Reason to be suspected that this is any Man's Design; and that we may have Assurance enough that a Thing is not, which yet we must grant was possible to have been. Particularly as to the Matter we are now speaking of:

First, In case the Author of any Book, or of any Report, relates a *Matter of Fact*, of which there are not, nor well could be, any other Witnesses but *himself*; as if he says that *he* has received from God such a Revelation, with Order to publish it to the World, or that *he himself* was an Eye or Ear-witness that such a Thing was privately done or spoken by another; the *Credibility* of such a Report, whether written or spoken, depends partly upon the *Nature* of the Report it self; partly upon the *Credit* of its *Author*; and partly upon the *Proofs* that he gives of his *Honesty* and *Veracity* in that *particular*. And where there is a full Concurrence of all these, that is, when the Matter of the Report is credible in it self; when its Author is a Person of Credit; and when he gives the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular; there is no Reason to reject his Testimony, there is *sufficient Reason* to give Credit to it.

1. If the *Matter* of his Report be *credible* in it self. And if what he reports be, that he himself has received such a Revelation from God, with Order to publish it to the World, I say, that this Report in the general is a credible Report; because it is very agreeable to the *Goodness* of God, and therefore not unlikely, that he should impart to Men, by a special Revelation, such Things as are very useful for them to know, and which could not be known, or not so well, not so fully, clearly, and certainly, any other Way, as by Revelation; and it is certainly not *incredible*, that He that has given us a Tongue to utter Words, and Skill to express thereby our Thoughts

to one another, should have *Power* and *Means* to reveal and express his own Mind, in such a Manner, that a Man may understand his Meaning; and it is likewise certainly not *incredible* in it self, that God, intending to declare his Will to Mankind, should make use of the *Ministry* of a *Man* for this Purpose, and having made known his Will to one Man, give him Commission to communicate the same to others.

If therefore there be any Thing incredible in the Report of a divine Revelation, it must be in the *special Matter* of it. But altho' the particular Matter of any such divine Revelation be such a Thing as we could never have found out by natural Reason; I say, it is nevertheless *credible* as a Matter *divinely revealed*; if it implies no *Contradiction*; if it be not contrary to *natural Reason*; if it be not *repugnant* to a *former divine Revelation* that is well attested; and if it be a Doctrine *worthy* of God; that is, if in its true Consequences it has no Tendency to encourage Sin; but on the contrary, has a plain Tendency to promote the Practice of Piety and Virtue among Men. Against such a Revelation as this there can be no just Objection made from the *Matter* of it: There is no Improbability that such a Thing as, this should be the Subject of a divine Revelation.

Or if what he Reports be, that *he himself* was by when such a Thing was privately done or spoken by another; in this case the *Matter* of his Report is *credible* in it self, if what he says he was an Eye or Ear-witness of, be a proper *Object* of those *Senses*; if it be not an impossible Thing; if it does not imply a *Contradiction*. And in this case, the *Difficulty*, the *Strangeness*, the *Uncommonness* of the Thing; its being a Thing that was never known to be done or said before, or which no Account can be given of by *Reason*, or *natural Causes*, is no just Exception to the Truth of it. There is nothing in this Kind absolutely incredible, but what is plainly impossible. But,

2. The *Credibility* of any Report, (supposing the Matter of it to be credible) depends, in good Measure, upon the *Credit* of its *Author*.

And then a Man may reasonably be thought an *Author*, or a *Witness* of good *Credit*, in *Matters* of his *own Knowledge*, when he appears, and by all his other Words and Actions *shews* himself to be, *grave*, *sober*, *considerate*, and in his *right Wits*; when he is a Person of *unblemish'd Reputation*; when he was never known to *lye*, or *feign*, or *deceive* in other Cases; when he gives no just Ground to suspect that he is an *intriguing* or *designing Person*; and lastly, when he himself is no *Party* to the Cause, has no worldly Interest carrying on in it, no Design of Honour or Profit, or other temporal Advantage, that, to Appearance, can be served by his giving such Testimony; when he will be neither the better, if his Report be credited, nor the worse, if it be not believed. Such a Witness as this cannot reasonably be excepted against: But,

3. Even such a Report made by such a Person, is still farther *credible*, in case he gives also the best *Proofs* that can be given, or that the Case will bear, of his *Veracity* in that Particular.

And it is one very good *Token* of a Man's own firm *Persuasion* of the Truth of what he says, if he gives his Testimony in a *grave* and *serious Manner*, and if he appears to have at that Time a good *Sense* of *Religion* on his Mind. Upon which Account a solemn *Oath*, by which God is called upon to witness the Truth of what is said, is reckon'd the greatest Assurance that ordinarily can be given of the Truth of any human Testimony; and therefore by Evidence given upon *Oath*, all Questions of the greatest Consequence to Men in this World are finally decided: An *Oath* for Confirmation is to Men an *End* of all Strife. Seeing therefore that the great Credit that is given to an *Oath*, is grounded upon that serious *Sense* of *Religion* which the Wit-
ness

ness is supposed to have in his Mind, when he declares that he speaks as in the Presence of Almighty God; whenever there is good Evidence given by any Person of the *same* serious *Sense* of *Religion*, his Testimony, tho' without the Formality of an Oath, is not less *credible*.

Again, it is a farther *Token* of a Man's firm *Belief* of what he reports or affirms, in case, the Matter of his Report being such as is naturally influential upon Practice, *he* himself *lives* and *acts* in all Respects agreeably thereto: And especially, if in Consequence thereof he *declines* making such *Gain* and *Profit* to himself, as it is probable he would have done, had he been otherwise persuaded; and *denies* himself those worldly *Pleasures* and sensual *Gratifications*, which other Men, not so persuaded, do freely allow themselves in; and voluntarily *undertakes* such *Labours*, and *endures* such *Hardships*, as it can hardly be supposed any Man of another Persuasion would undergo.

But the surest *Token* that any Man can give of his *Veracity*, is *persisting* in the Evidence he has once given to the last; when no Promises of Wealth, Honour, or Promotion, can persuade him to forbear speaking the Things which he has seen and heard; when being brought before Kings and Rulers, and streightly threatened to hold his Peace, he is thereby rather the more emboldned to speak; when being racked and tortured to retract his Evidence, he continues, in the midst of the greatest Torments, to witness the same Thing that he did before; and in fine, when having a certain Prospect before him of losing all that can be dear to him in this World, and even his Life it self, unless he will either go back from what he has said, or at least forbear to repeat and confirm it; he willingly and chearfully seals his Testimony with his Blood.

Such Assurance as this we may have of the Honesty and Veracity of a Person that witnesses a Thing only of his own private Knowledge; and this being the best we can have, he is an unreasonable Man that desires more, or says this is not sufficient.

But *secondly*, in case the Author of any Book, or of any Report, relates a Thing that was done or spoken publicly, in the Sight or Hearing of many others besides himself, we may have still greater Assurance, of his Honesty and Veracity, and of the Truth of the Report it self; and we have so, we have, I think, the greatest that can be, if *after* the Report is published, especially if it be a Matter of great Consequence to the World, it be not *contradicted* by any of those that were present; and much rather, if *they all*, or a great many of them, *agree* in testifying the same Thing; especially if *they* also are *Persons* of the like good *Credit*, and if *they* also give the *same Proofs* and *Tokens* of their *Veracity* that he did.

Such Evidence as this of the *Veracity* of any Author in what he writes, is beyond all reasonable Exception: And therefore when many, and especially when all these Evidences of Truth and Honesty do concur, I think we may be *sufficiently assured* that he did not design to impose upon his Readers. But,

(3.) If we may be well enough assured of the Author of any Book, and also of his Honesty; yet, it was farther objected, that this *Author*, whoever he was, could not be sure that he himself was not deceived in his *Opinion* of his own *Inspiration*, or of a *Revelation* made to himself, or in the *Truth* of any other *Matter of Fact* which he has related as of his own *Knowledge*.

But, *first*, if he could not be sure of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to himself; how then could *any Man* now a-days be *sure* of the same, if God should vouchsafe to speak to us now, as it is said he did in former Times to the *Prophets* and other *inspired Men*, by *himself*, or an *Angel*? So that this Objection, if it be well grounded, cuts off not only all

reasonable

reasonable Belief of former Revelations, but likewise all reasonable Belief of any Revelation that can now be made to ourselves or others; and it is to no Purpose, to offer at any Thing to convince *those* of the Truth of any Revelation, who are of *Opinion* that even the infinite Power and Wisdom of God cannot make such a Revelation of his Will to them as would be *credible*, such as they should reasonably judge *sufficient* for their Conviction.

This therefore is all that I shall say to this Part of the Objection; that if they suppose, as they seem to do, that Almighty God cannot any ways so reveal his Will to any Man, as that the *Prophet* himself can be assured that it is a divine Revelation; they suppose God to be of less *Power* and *Skill* than a *Man* is, who can utter his Mind in such a Manner to another, that the other shall have no Doubt, who it is that speaks, or what he means: But if they will but vouchsafe to grant, that God could *now* speak, or otherwise reveal his Will, in such Manner to us, as that we could not possibly have any Doubt, whether it was the *Voice* of God or an *Angel*, or not; then I say there can be no Question but that he might speak in as plain a Manner to Men in former Times; and there is almost as little Question but that he has done so.

But many, it may be said, have *pretended* to *Inspirations* or *Revelations*, and, we have Reason to believe, have *thought* themselves inspired, when yet the *Matter* they have said they were inspired with, or which they have said has been revealed to them, has been such as has clearly *evidenced* to all rational Men the *Falsity* of their *Pretence*.

True; And so likewise many Men have *thought* themselves at such a Place, in such a Company, hearing, seeing, speaking, or doing such and such Things, when yet, as it proves afterwards, they have been all the while only in a *Dream*: But what then? Does it follow that because a Man may *think* himself *awake* when he is in a *Dream*, he can therefore never be *sure* that he is *awake*? And as little does it follow, that because some Persons of *weak* or *distempered Brains* have *thought* they have had Revelations, therefore no *sober* and *judicious Man* in his right *Wits* can ever be *sure* of a *Revelation*.

But suppose a Man at the first, being (as it may well be imagined he must be) in a great Surprise and Astonishment at the Strangeness and Novelty of the Thing, should not be very certain of the Reality of the Revelation; should not well know whether he was awake or asleep; yet certainly the *same Signs* which are *sufficient* afterwards to *satisfie* other Men of the Truth of his Inspiration or Revelation, must be allowed to be *sufficient* to *satisfie* himself of the same Thing.

And therefore, If *Moses*, for Instance, when GOD first spake to him in *Horeb* out of the burning Bush, was in some Doubt whether he was in a Trance, or awake and in his right Mind, whether he really heard a Voice, or only dream'd so: It can't well be supposed that he continued in the same Doubt afterwards, when having at GOD's Command, *cast his Rod upon the Ground*, Exod. iii. 2. *it became a Serpent*; and having at the same divine Command *taken it up by the Tail*, *it became a Rod again in his Hand*; and when after that, by his first putting his Hand into his Bosom it became *leprous as Snow*, and after his putting it in the second Time, *it came out like his other Flesh*. Exod. iv. 3, 4. Verse 6, 7.

Or if it can be imagined, that he might possibly take all this to be only a Continuation of his Dream, or at least, might not in all this while be sure that it was not a Dream; it is not conceivable however, that in *all the Time* that he was travelling from *Horeb* into *Egypt*, he should not ever be so thoroughly awake as to be *sure* that he was *awake*; and if he was, that he should not in all that Time make such *Reflections* upon what had passed, as either to per-

ceive plainly that it had been only a *Dream*, or else to be very *certain* that it had not been a *Dream*, but a *Reality*.

Or if it can be conceived, that his Amazement and Concern at what had happened was so great, that in all this Time he might not be so well come to himself, as to be sure that he had *had* a true divine Revelation; yet I think it was not possible that he should remain in the same Uncertainty, after he had been in *Egypt* for some while, and had wrought not only those two Miracles over again in the Sight of the *Israelites*, whereby *they* were fully persuaded of his divine Mission; but likewise all the other great Signs and Wonders mentioned in the seventh and following Chapters of *Exodus*, some of which the *Egyptians*, and even the *Magicians* themselves, could not but acknowledge *were done by the Finger of God*.

But this, it will be said, is proving one doubtful Thing by another as doubtful, a *Revelation* by a *Miracle*: For it was farther urged in the Objection, that no Author of any Book could be *sure* that he was not deceived in any other Matter that he has related as of his own *Knowledge*; that it is possible there might be a Mistake in the *Sign* and *Proof* of the divine Revelation, as well as in the *Revelation* it self; that it is possible that the Author of the Report (whether it was the *Prophet* himself, or any other Man who has reported the Miracles done by the *Prophet*, as Matters of his own Knowledge) did *imagine* he *saw* Things which he did not see, and that he *heard* Things which he did not hear.

But if this be supposed possible, that any Man, and much more that several Men agreeing in the same Report, the Organs of whose Senses were rightly disposed, and who by all their other Actions and Discourses appeared to be sober, and considerate, and judicious, should yet in the Day time, and in a clear Light, and when they were sure they were broad awake, be mistaken in the plainest Matters of Sense; then there is no such Thing as *Certainty* in the World; then they that make the Objection can be no more sure of what they themselves see and hear than other Men can be; and it is to no Purpose to hold an Argument with such as dare not believe their own Eyes and Ears. The only Sense whereby, I think, such Men can be convinced, must be *Feeling*: And it will be well for them if they can carry the same *Scepticism* with them into the other World, and when they are encompassed about with the *Flames* of *Hell*, can be able to doubt whether it be a *real* or a *painted Fire*, whether they are *tormented* in that Flame, or not.

Leaving these therefore to be convinced in the other World, as being, I think, not capable of Conviction here; I shall content my self with having said, what, I suppose, is enough to satisfy others, that the *Witness* of a plain Matter of *Fact* may be *sure* of the Truth of what he witnesses; and that it is possible for God to speak so plainly to Men, that they may be *certain* they have a divine Revelation; and that such Evidence may be given of the *Veracity* of an *Author*, and of the *Authority* of a *Book*, as is *sufficient* to satisfy a reasonable Man.

And by this, and what was said before, I hope, I have made it appear, that a *standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well *contrived* and so well *attested*, as to be *sufficient* to effect its Design, *viz.* to bring Men to Repentance. Whether the *standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be *sufficient* for this Purpose, will be Matter of Enquiry in the next Discourses.

In the mean Time, what has been already said may serve to dispose us to hear without Prejudice the Arguments that may be offered to prove the *Sufficiency* of *Holy Scripture*. For,

1. If it be possible that there may be such a *standing Revelation*, it is very *probable* that there is one; for from that natural Notion that we have of the

Goodness

Goodness of GOD, it may be fairly argued, that he is not wanting to Men in the necessary Means of Salvation; and therefore, it being evident that there are not new Revelations made every Day, it may be reasonably concluded that the Reason is, because there is already some *standing Revelation* of GOD Will extant that is *sufficient* to direct us in the Way to Happiness. And,

2. If there be already any such *standing Revelation* extant, it may be strongly *presumed*, that it is *that* which we have in the *Holy Scripture*; because there is no other Book, that we know of, which has such good Evidences of divine Authority and Inspiration as *that* has.

Let us then be prepared to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the *Christian Faith and Religion*, with *unprejudiced Minds*, with a sincere Love and Desire of Truth, and with a Resolution to hear Reason and to be convinced by it.

And above all, (which indeed is the best Preparation for Truth, and the best Security against Error) let us in the Sincerity of our Hearts, apply our selves to GOD for his Help and Direction; And that our Prayer may be effectual, let us be careful to approve our selves to him, by a conscientious Discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Temperance and Charity, which are clearly taught even by natural Reason; and be readily disposed to practise whatever else we shall learn to be our Duty by any farther Illumination: For if any John vii. 17 Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.



DISCOURSE LXXXIX.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-
Revelation ;As to the *Matter* of it.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.**And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.**And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.*

THE first Thing which I propounded to do in discoursing on these Words, was, to endeavour to shew, that the present *standing Revelation* of GOD's Will, contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament*, is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets* (they have also *Christ* and his *Apostles*) *let them hear them.*

And if that *standing Revelation* which GOD hath made to us of his Will in the *Holy Scriptures* can upon any Account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be, I think, either, 1. Because no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose ; or, 2. Because there are some particular *Defects* in that Revelation which we have in the *Holy Scriptures* which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as it is possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

I have therefore, in a former Discourse upon these Words, endeavoured to shew in general, that a *standing Revelation* of GOD's Will may be so well *contrived*, and so well *attested*, as to be *sufficient* for this Purpose.

I proceed now, in the second Place,

2. To consider, whether that *standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, be such a Revelation; whether it be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, and fully to direct them in the Way to Happiness; or, whether there be not some particular *Defects* in this Revelation, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose as it is possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it: And if it be in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give us *sufficient Directions* what to do, or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I shall shew, (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes, are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires; and (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* which are taught by it.

(1.) I shall shew that the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do.

And of this there can be little Doubt among those that believe the divine Inspiration and Authority of the *Holy Scripture*; because to them its own Testimony of its own *Sufficiency* is a Proof thereof beyond all Exception. For, if, as the *Apostle* says, 2 *Tim.* iii. 16. it be *profitable for Doctrine, and for Reproof, and for Correction, and for Instruction in Righteousness*; it is plainly profitable for *all* the *Purposes* for which we can desire a divine Revelation. And, if, as he says in the next Verse, it was given to make *perfect the Man of God* (that is, the Man whose Business it is to teach and instruct others) and *thoroughly to furnish him unto all good Works*, it cannot be *deficient* in delivering all such *Rules* and *Directions* as are necessary to be given by a *Pastor* to the People committed to his Care. And if, as the same *Apostle* had said at the fifteenth Verse of that Chapter, it be *able to make us wise unto Salvation*, we have no Reason to desire to be *wiser* than this excellent Book can make us. And if all this could truly be said by the *Apostle*, before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was completed; if it could be said by him of those *Holy Scriptures* which *Timothy* had *known from a Child*, that is, of the *Books* of the *Old Testament* only, much more may it be now said of the *Books* of *both Testaments* together.

But to speak at large of this Point at present, would be too great a Digression from the Design of these *Lectures*, which were intended only against *Infidels*, not against any *Seet* of *Christians*; and *such* they pretend to be, such, because they hold the Foundation *Christ Jesus*, they may in Charity be *allow'd* to be, who do chiefly differ from us in this Article, and deny the *Sufficiency* of *Scripture*, only because they are resolved to maintain some gainful *Doctrines* and *Practices* of their own *Church*, which they are sensible have no Warrant from *Scripture*, and so can be maintained no other Way but by affirming that they have been delivered down to them by *Tradition*, and that *unwritten Tradition* is a necessary *Supplement* to the *written Word*, and of equal *Authority* with it.

For between us and *Infidels* who reject the *Scripture*, the *Sufficiency* of the *Scripture* as a *Rule* of Faith and Manners is hardly Matter of *Controversy*: For these do not reject the *Scripture* because it teaches too *little*, but rather because it teaches too *much*; because it teaches *Doctrines* above their *Reason*, and commands such *Duties* as they do not like to *practise*; and if it taught less than it does, they would be more ready to own its divine Authority.

Luke i. 1.

But nevertheless even *these Men*, that they may leave no Stone unturned, will be sometimes discoursing upon this Point; and altho' those *Books of Holy Scripture* which are now extant, and which are now generally receiv'd, do teach much more than they themselves are willing to believe and practise, yet, that they may, as much as they can, unsettle the Belief of others, do not stick to argue against the *Christian Religion* from this *Topick*, and to affirm that the *Books of Holy Scripture*, which are now receiv'd, do not contain the whole Will of God. For there were, say they, in former Times, several other *Gospels* and *Epistles*, and other *Tracts*, designed to instruct Men in the *Christian Religion*, which were written by the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, and which were consequently of the same Authority, in themselves, with those which are now receiv'd into the *Canon*; of which nevertheless we have nothing now left, but the Names and Titles, or some imperfect and uncertain Fragments; so that it may well be doubted, whether those *few Books* which are now remaining, are *sufficient* to instruct us in all necessary Points of Knowledge and Practice. And of this Matter of Fact, there is, they say, some Evidence even from the *Scripture* it self: For St. Luke, in the Beginning of his *Gospel* takes Notice, that *many before him, had taken in Hand to set forth a Declaration of those Things which were surely believed among Christians*; that is, had written and published *Narratives* of the Life, Actions, Miracles, Preaching, Death, and Resurrection of our *Saviour*. But there are no *Histories* of this Kind, no *Gospels* now extant, that were written before St. Luke's, except only St. Matthew's and St. Mark's; and if there had been no more extant at that Time, it would have been very improper, they say, for the *Evangelist* to have said, that *many* had written upon this Subject, when he spake only of *those two*. And that there was Matter enough for several such *Narratives*, so that tho' they were very different *Gospels*, they might nevertheless be all true, we are told by St. John, who wrote his *Gospel* the last of the four *Evangelists*, John xx. 30. *Many other Signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book*; and again, Ch. xxi. Vers. 25. *There are also many other Things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the World it self could not contain the Books that should be written*.

Now if it be true, that there were several *other Books* formerly extant, but which are now lost, that were written by the *Apostles* and other *inspired Men*, and consequently by *divine Inspiration*; either *these* were *needless* when written, and it is unreasonable to suppose that any *Book* when written by divine Inspiration was *needless*; or else the *Loss* of these *Books* is a *Loss* to *Religion*, and we cannot be well assured, that those which we have now remaining do *sufficiently* instruct us in all Points of *Christian Faith* and Practice.

But admit the Truth of this Matter of Fact, viz. that *more Books* were written by the *Apostles*, or other *inspired Men*, than are now extant; which I will not now dispute, because I think it needless, because I think it may be granted without any Prejudice to the *Christian Cause*; altho' there be none, or at most but very slender Evidence of it; nay, admit more than is upon any good Grounds alleged, viz. not only that several, but that every one of the *Apostles* and immediate *Disciples* of *Christ*, every one that had heard him preach, and had been a Witness of his Life, and Miracles, and Resurrection, and had received the miraculous Gifts of the *Holy Ghost*, did write a distinct *Gospel*, giving an Account of some of the most remarkable Passages of our *Saviour's* Life which *he* had been a Witness of; and did likewise, as he had Occasion, write *Epistles* or other *Tracts* for the Use and Instruction of the *Christian Church*; every one of all which *Books*, if they were now extant, and as well attested as the *Books* of the *New Testament* are, would be of equal Authority with them, because dictated by the same Spirit, by which all the

the *Apostles* were led into all Truth, and had all Things that *Jesus* had spoken brought to their Remembrance; yet, I say, it would by no Means follow from hence, either that those *Books* which are now lost (if indeed there are any lost that were written by the *Apostles*) were needless when they were written, or that those which do now remain are not sufficient. And a very little Consideration of the State of Things as it was then, and as it is now, will make this which I have said very plain.

For the Case then was thus: The Gospel of *Christ* was to be preached to the whole World by a few Persons, who had been Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to confirm their Testimony of him by doing the like Miracles themselves: And that this great Work might be accomplished within the Term of their Life, it was necessary that they should quickly disperse themselves into all Parts of the World, one going this Way and another that, according as they had agreed among themselves, or were directed by the Spirit. And in this Division of Countries, every one had a large Province assigned to him, so that having much Work to do in a little Time, he could not well stay long in one Place: And upon this account it might be very proper for him, after he had preached the Gospel in one City, and made a good number of Converts, and ordained Elders, and established a Christian Church there, when he went thence, to leave behind him in Writing the Sum of what he had before preached among them, for the Help of their Memories, for the Direction of their Pastors, and to prevent any Misrepresentation that might afterwards be made of his Doctrine by ignorant or designing Men. And after he was gone from thence, he might have frequent Occasion to send them Letters either to confirm them in their Faith, or to caution them against some Errors which he had heard were springing up among them, or to correct some Fault in their Discipline or Manners.

By this Means, I say, it might well enough be (tho' there be no Evidence that it was so) that in the first Age of Christianity, there might be, besides occasional Letters, as many distinct Gospels as there were Apostles; every one writing a Gospel for the proper Use of those Churches which he himself had planted, and in the Language that was best known to them. And this, if it was done, might be no more than might be then necessary, when it was not so easy as it is now, since the Increase of Commerce and Navigation, and the Invention of Printing, to communicate and disperse the Books that are published in one Country, to other Countries that are far distant. Besides, if this could have been done then, it can't well be supposed that a Gospel written by any other of the Apostles, who had never been in that Province or Division, and of whom they had never heard perhaps more than only his Name, should be at first of so great Authority to them, as a Gospel written by that very Apostle, by whose Ministry they had been converted, and of whose Miracles they themselves had been Witnesses.

Thus it might be; and if it was so, it might be agreeable to the divine Wisdom and Goodness so to order it, that before those Books of the New Testament which we now have could be well dispersed, and upon good Attestation receiv'd in all Christian Countries, some particular Churches, and especially those most remote from Judea, should have for their present Use, other Books written by some other of the Apostles, containing the same Form of sound Words, and relating the same Things concerning the Life and Doctrine of our Saviour that these do.

And that some of those many Books which might be written by the Apostles or other inspired Men upon this Subject, should be lost, is no Marvel at all: It is rather a Wonder (considering the Poverty of the first Christians, and the constant Persecutions they were then under, and the many Revolutions of Government that have been in Christendom since that Time,) that so many as we

have

have now left could be preserved so many Ages before Printing was found out. And *those* were the most likely to be lost, which were published in *rude* and *barbarous* Countries, and which were written in some *Language* that was *peculiar* to one Nation only: And *those* were the most easy, and consequently the most probable to be *preserved*, which were published in the *learned* Part of the World, and written in the most *learned Language* then in Use.

But although a greater Number of *inspired Books* than are now extant, might be necessary in the first Age of *Christianity*; before the *Christian Churches*, then newly planted in all Countries of the then known World, could have Communication with one another; it cannot be argued from hence, that *those Books* which we have now remaining are *not sufficient* for the present Time, and for all the Time that has passed since the *other Books* were *lost*; but rather, it may very reasonably be presumed, that there was *nothing* more, for Substance, in *those Books*, which are supposed to be *lost*, than there is in *these* which are now remaining; so that the Loss of them may be no real Loss or Derriment to Religion, and those which remain and are now received in all Christian Churches, may be abundantly *sufficient* to instruct us in all Points of *Christian Faith* and Practice.

Luke i. 4.

John xx. 30.
31.

And there is indeed no Reason to think they are not, seeing some of those single Books which we have now, were written for this very Purpose, were designed as *Compendiums* of the whole *Christian Institution*. For St. *Luke* wrote his Gospel, that *Theophilus might know the Certainty of those Things wherein he had been instructed*; and if this was the *Evangelist's Design*, it cannot be supposed but that he thought he had put into his Gospel whatever was *necessary* or very material: And St. *John* in the same Place where he acknowledges that he had omitted the Relation of many Things which *Jesus* did, says that he *had written* the Things contained in his Gospel, that Men *might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have Life through his Name*: By which it appears, that he thought he himself had written *enough* in his Gospel, to persuade Men to believe in *Christ*, and to direct them in the Way to eternal Life. There being therefore in those *Books* of the *New Testament* which we now have, several Abridgments of the whole *Christian Doctrine*, it cannot with any Reason be pretended, that all these Books together are *not sufficient* fully to instruct us therein.

Besides, the Gospel of *Christ* that was preached, suppose by St. *Thomas* in *India*, or by St. *Simon* in *Africa*, or by any other of the *Apostles* in Countries remote from *Judea*, or without the Bounds of the *Roman Empire*, was undoubtedly the very *same Gospel* that was preached by St. *Peter* and St. *Paul*, or those other of the *Apostles* whose *Books* are now extant, and received by the *Catholic Church*; for they were all taught by the same Master *Christ*, and were all enlightened by the same *Holy Ghost*; so that if any of them did, as it is reported they did, write any *Gospels* for the present Use of those particular *Churches* which they had planted; tho' they might be somewhat *different* from any of the *four Gospels* which we now have, in the Expression, or perhaps in the Relation of some particular Passages of our *Saviour's Life*, which our *Evangelists* have omitted; just as the *four Gospels* which we now have, do differ from one another; yet for Substance they must needs have been the *same* with *these*, and with *one another*, if indeed they were all true Relations of the Matters of which the Authors thereof had been Witnesses; so that if we had them all now, they could all together teach us no other *Doctrines* than are taught in the *Books* of the *New Testament*.

Nevertheless, I do not deny, but that if we had more Books of this Kind
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than we have; that if we had all the Books that were written by the *Apostles*, or their immediate *Successors*, who had been taught by them, they might be of very good Use to us, to help us to understand more readily and easily those Books which we have, as now we receive from some Portions of *Holy Scripture*, great Light, to help us to understand, and to put a right Interpretation upon others: But perhaps it was for *this* very Reason that the Providence of God did order no more to be written, than were written, or has suffered those to be lost that are supposed to be lost, that it might cost us some Pains and Study to understand our Religion; that so our Knowledge as well as our Practice being in some Measure the Fruit of our own Industry, might be a proper Subject of Reward.

In short, that there were more Books in the first Age of Christianity, written by *Apostles* or other inspired Men that are now extant, or than if extant can be well proved to be of their Writing, is a Point which I believe cannot be now upon any certain Evidence either affirmed or denied; but if it be granted, I say however, there is no Reason to infer from thence, that those which we now have are not sufficient. For if there be a God and a Providence, and if there be any Truth in the Scripture-Declarations of the Love of God to Mankind, and that he would have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth, most certainly the necessary Means of Mens Salvation is a proper Subject of the divine Care: And if so; it cannot be thought but that the same good Providence which, as is now supposed, took Care for the writing of more Books when more might be necessary, has likewise taken Care for the Preservation of so many of these Books as are now sufficient. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with, will not grant that there is such a particular Providence of God; yet if they will but allow that God is just: That he is not a hard Master, expecting to reap where he has not sown, I think they must allow that all Things necessary to our Salvation, not knowable by Reason, are taught in the Books of *Holy Scripture* which we now have, because there are no other Books extant which we have Reason to receive and accept as divine Revelation.

Or if they deny this, it will lie upon them to produce those other Books which we ought to receive besides these, and to give good Evidence to the World of their divine Authority. Which when they shall have done, or if they shall but only shew that there is as good Reason to receive them as these; we must own our selves to blame, if we shall not then take them also into the Canon of Scripture.

But till that shall be done, what hath been already said is enough to shew that the *Holy Scripture* is a compleat Rule both of Faith and Manners. Especially considering (as was noted before) that whenever the Insufficiency of Scripture in this respect, is urged by those who do not believe the Scripture, which are the Persons I have now to deal with, it can be only for cavilling sake: The true Reason of their Backwardness to receive it as divine Revelation, being, not because it teaches not enough, but because it teaches more than they are willing to believe, and commands more than they are disposed to practise. For I cannot imagine that these Men do truly desire more Duty than is laid upon them in the Books of Scripture, now received by the Christian Church; but what they may most reasonably be thought to desire, is either some better Encouragement to understand that difficult Task which the Scripture lays upon them, or some better Evidence that the Scripture is a divine Revelation.

I proceed now therefore to the second Thing propounded, which was,

(2.) To shew that the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes are *sufficient* to *persuade* Men to do what it requires.

Now *Hopes* and *Fears* are the great Springs of Action; and the greater the Good is we hope for, or the Evil we fear, the stronger do they move and incline us to Action; and therefore how difficult soever the Undertaking be, so it be but possible; if the *Motives* are *proportioned* to the *Difficulty*, they must be granted to be *sufficient Inducements* to undertake it.

But that the Task or Business required of us, is possible to be done, needs not to be proved now, because it must be granted by those who say they believe they should be persuaded to do what is required, if they had *better Encouragement*; for no *Arguments* or *Motives* whatsoever can reasonably persuade a Man to undertake a Thing that he believes *impossible*.

Supposing it therefore possible; I say, that whatsoever Difficulty there really is, or we may apprehend there is, in a Christian Life; if any *Motives* that could possibly be proposed to us can be thought *sufficient* to induce us to undertake it; most evidently, those *Motives* which the *Gospel* proposes, are so; because better or greater cannot be so much as conceived or imagined; seeing both the good Things which it promises to persuade us to Virtue, and the evil Things which it threatens to deter us from Sin, are, as to the *Matter* of them, the *greatest* that we are capable of *enjoying* or *suffering*; and consequently the most probable to raise our Hopes, and to excite our Fears to the highest Pitch.

For the Arguments that do most strongly persuade us to any Thing, are from *Interest*; from the Profit and Advantage we shall reap by doing it; from the Tendency it has to make us happy; and *Happiness* consists in being perfectly free from all *Pain* and *Trouble* and *Vexation*; and in the *full* and *free Enjoyment* of whatsoever is *pleasing* and *delightful* to us.

But now *both these* the *Gospel* gives *Assurance* of to all those that believe and obey it; that is, that they shall thereby be freed from that intolerable Pain and Misery, which the Wicked and Unbelievers shall be condemned to, and also that they shall thereby be instated in the perfectest and completest Happiness both of Body and Soul; in a Happiness far greater than they do or can enjoy now, nay, in a Happiness much greater than any they can now have so much as a Conception or Idea of in their Minds. *For Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man the Things that God hath prepared for them that love him.*

1 Cor. ii. 9.

But there is, besides, a *remarkable Circumstance* which does much enhance the Value of any Good, and likewise much aggravate the Evil of any Pain or Misery; *viz.* its *Duration*: For how great soever the Good or Evil proposed to persuade us to any Thing, are in themselves; yet if they be but of short Continuance, if they will soon expire and be at an End, we reckon it not worth while to be at much Pains to obtain such a short-lived Good, or to avoid such a transient Evil. But in this respect also, the *Motives* both of Hope and Fear, which the *Gospel* proposes to us, do far surpass all those Persuatives or Inducements which Sin can offer: For the most we can hope to escape by the Commission of any Sin, is the Pain and Suffering of a few Weeks or Years, or a temporal Death; which last, yet, we cannot be so vain as to hope to escape clearly, for we can at most but delay it for a short Season; and on the other Side, the greatest Good we can propose to our selves, or so much as hope to obtain by any Sin, is the Pleasure of a short Life: In which Hope, Men are likewise very often most sadly disappointed; their sinful Gratifications commonly bringing with them,

or drawing after them, much more Trouble and Vexation even in this World, than the little Pleasure they can reap from them is sufficient to compensate for. But if it were not so; if the Pleasures of Sin were certain and sincere; yet they are but for a Moment; they can be but short, because our Life it self is but short; being, as St. James says, *a Vapour, which appeareth for a little Time, and then vanisheth away.* Jam. iv. 14.

But the *Motives* of both Kinds, which the Gospel proposes, have in this respect also, that is, in respect of the *Duration* of the Good or Evil proposed, all the Advantage that is possible. For the Misery we shall escape, and the Blessedness we shall attain, by yielding Belief and Obedience to the Gospel, are, both of them, of *eternal and endless Duration*. *A Worm that never dieth, a Fire that never shall be quenched; everlasting Punishment; eternal Damnation; everlasting Fire; everlasting Destruction; the Blackness of Darknes for ever; a Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where they shall be tormented Day and Night for ever and ever; and where the Smoke of their Torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.* These are the *Evils* which the Gospel threatens to Sin: And if these be not *sufficient* to deter Men from it, what can be *sufficient*? What *Evil* can that Man be supposed to be afraid of who is not afraid of *everlasting Burning*? A *greater Evil* cannot be threatened; and he who is not scared by this, would certainly be less scared by the Threatning of a less Evil. And on the other Side, *everlasting Life; an incorruptible Crown; an Inheritance that fadeth not away; a Kingdom that cannot be moved; an eternal Weight of Glory; Fulness of Joy in the Presence of God, and Pleasures for evermore at his right Hand;* these are good Things promised to Obedience; and could greater Things be promised than these? could we our selves, if we were put to desire what we would, desire more? and if the Promise of unspeakable and everlasting Blessedness, be not *sufficient* to prevail with us to undertake a godly and Christian Life, certainly nothing can be *sufficient*. If God should make ever so many Revelations of his Will to Mankind, he could not propose greater Encouragement to Obedience, than he has done already in the Gospel: And if those good Things which he has promised, do not move us, it is not because they are not great enough to move a wise and considering Man, but because we are so bent upon Sin that we will not give way to any Considerations that might serve to restrain us from it.

In a Word; the *Gospel Motives* to Repentance and Obedience comprehended all that we can fear or hope for; so far therefore as Fears or Hopes can work upon us, there is plainly nothing wanting in that *standing Revelation* that God has made of his Will, by *Moses and the Prophets*, and especially by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, to make it successful, that is, to persuade Men to Repentance, if they will but hear what they say, and give Credit to it.

But it is not, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, a *better Rule* that they want, than the *Scripture* is, or *better Motives* to persuade them to lead their Lives according to it, than the *Scripture* proposes; but what they chiefly want, is some *better Evidence*, some greater *Certainty* of the *Truth* of the *Scripture*.

This therefore was what I propounded to do in the next Place; viz. to shew what we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* which are taught by it.

But because the handling of this Point would take up too much Time, I shall chuse to defer it; and conclude this present Discourse with an earnest *Exhortation* to all those that do sincerely believe the Gospel, to *con-*

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der often and seriously of those *great Motives* which it proposes to persuade Men.

For though we live in an Age of great *Infidelity*, wherein some are bold enough to strike at the very Foundation of all Religion, and to dispute at least, if not deny the most evident and undeniable Truths of it; and others think they pay Respect enough to the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind, if they do but grant themselves to be *Deists*; and wherein, even among those that openly profess the *Christian* Religion, there is in a great many a Spice and Tincture of *Atheism* and *Infidelity*; and tho' they do not actually disbelieve the Gospel-Truths, yet they believe them so coldly and faintly, that their Faith may rather be called an Inclination to believe, than a full Persuasion; I say, even in this incredulous and unbelieving Age, I am nevertheless verily persuaded that for *one* Man that is ruin'd by *Infidelity*, *many hundreds* are ruined by *Thoughtlessness* and *Inconsideration*; that where there is *one* that is wicked, because he believes nothing of the *Gospel-motives*, nor that there is any such Place or State as Heaven or Hell, there are a great *many* that do believe these Things, and yet continue in their wicked Course, because they never take any Time seriously to consider what Heaven and Hell are; and that vast, that infinite difference that there is between these two States; and how much it behoves them to use all Diligence to attain that, and to avoid this.

Leaving therefore those who believe little or nothing of these Things to my following Discourses, wherein I hope to prove the *Truth* of the *Gospel Revelation*, beyond all reasonable Exception; I shall now address my self to *you* that do *believe* these Things, and who, every Time you meet together in the Church, do *repeat* all the *Articles* of the *Christian Faith*, and *declare* your *Assent* thereto. And what I would desire of you is; that you would frequently *think* of those Things which you profess to believe, that you would *meditate* much and often thereupon, that you would seriously *consider* the Meaning thereof.

Particularly, that *Summary* of the *Gospel-motives* to Faith and Repentance before spoken of, that great and last Article of the *Christian Creed*, the *Life everlasting*; consider what it means, and do not content your selves only with saying every Day that you do believe an *everlasting Life after this*, but meditate likewise every Day, or very frequently at least, what an *everlasting Life* is, and of what *Sort* and *Kind* that everlasting Life will be.

Now *Life* is a State of *Sensation*; by *this* a living Body is distinguished from a dead Carcass, that the *living* Body *feels* what is done unto it, and is affected thereby either with Pain or Pleasure; whereas a *dead* Carcass is not capable of either, hath no Sense or Feeling of any Thing. When therefore in repeating the *Creed*, we declare that we believe we shall live again, after our Death, the Meaning is, that we shall be hereafter in such a State of *Sensation* as we are now; that in that Life we shall be as *sensible* of Pain or Pleasure, as we are in this Life.

But then, what makes the great Difference between this Life and that, is, that *this* is *short*, *transient* and *momentary*, that if it be pleasant, it is soon over, and that if it be painful it will not last long; whereas *that*, such as it is once, such it will *ever* be; for that is the Meaning of a *Life everlasting*; it is a Life that will *never be ended*; a Life that will *continue to all Eternity*.

And now that we come to speak of *Eternity*, tho' the Word has a fix'd Meaning; yet how are our Thoughts lost and bewildered when we set our selves to meditate thereupon? When we speak of a thousand, or ten thousand, or even of a million of Years, we have some Notion of what we say; but when we come to multiply these thousands, and millions, by ten thousands, or ten millions, or by millions of millions, our Thoughts are

are not capacious enough to conceive, and our Mouths want Words to express that infinite Length of Time which these Numbers do comprehend; and yet all that these Numbers denote, is nothing in Comparison with *Eternity*.

If the whole Sea were to run out Drop by Drop, what a prodigious Length of Time would this take up? and yet in Time this would be done; and they that live for ever would live to see the vast Caverns of the Ocean without one Drop of Water left in them: And which is more yet, there would be no Part of their Eternity then spent, they would then be as far from dying as they were at first.

Or if only once in ten thousand Years, one of the smallest Sands or Dusts were to be taken from the Earth, they that live for ever would live to see all this vast Bulk of the Earth by these slow and imperceptible Degrees wholly removed, not so much as a Grain or Atom of it left; nay, and even in this prodigious, this unconceivable Length of Time, their Life would not be in the least diminished, they would have the same boundless Eternity still, before them that they had, when the first Sand was taken away.

But what do I speak of these little Numbers, these Moments of Time, as they may truly be called, in Comparison with Eternity? For even all those Years in which the whole Earth might be removed, if only one single smallest Dust thereof were to be taken away once in ten thousand Years, I say, all these Years, may be expressed in Figures, in a Line of a few Inches long; but if the whole Expanse of Heaven were written quite over with Figures from the Top to the Bottom, and from the one Side to the other, even all these Figures, tho' set so close that there was not Room left for one more, would not denote or express *Eternity*; and when all these numberless Millions of Years were spent, he that lives for ever, would be, as it were, but just then beginning to live; and his Sight and Prospect of the Time before him would be still as boundless as ever.

Thus you see what is *eternal Life*, or rather, you see what *it is not*; it is a Length of Time that cannot be expressed in Words, or signified by Figures, or conceived in Thought: It is a Length of Time to which all that we can have any positive Notion of bears no Proportion.

And when we believe that we shall live *such a Life*, after this short Life is over; does it not highly behove us to think of it now, and to make the best Provision that is possible, that we may be happy in it.

And this leads me to the other Branch of Meditation on this Subject, which we ought likewise frequently and seriously to dwell upon in our Minds; namely of *what Sort* and *Kind* this eternal Life will be.

And as it is *Life*, it is (as was said before) a State of *Sensation*; and as it is an *everlasting Life*, it is a State in which we shall for *ever* feel our selves, either in *Pain* or at *Ease*.

And if there were no more in it than this; tho' the *Pain* we shall then endure were the least of those Pains wherewith we are now afflicted, a little Pain or Aking of one Joint or Member only; or tho' the *Pleasure* we shall then enjoy, were one of the least of those Pleasures wherewith we are now delighted; yet when we have added *Eternity* to these, what an infinite Difference is there between these two States? And how well must we needs think it worth all the Pains and Labour that we can take in this World, to secure to our selves a Portion in that better Sort of everlasting Life, in that Life, in which there is no *Pain*, though there be but little *Pleasure*?

But still our Thoughts are short; we have not yet a just Notion of the Difference between these two States. For if we believe the *Scripture*; and I speak now to those that do believe it; *that everlasting Pain* which the wicked will be condemned to, is not a light or gentle Pain; but the

sharpest, the acutest, the most tormenting that can be endured; and that *eternal Joy* which we have a good Hope of by the *Gospel*, is likewise the *greatest, the fullest, the completest* that we are capable of: For in representing the *former* to us, the *Scripture* all along expresses the *Torments of Hell* by such Pains as are here most afflicting to us; as the *Biting and Gnawing* of a *Worm*, the being *beaten* with *Stripes*, the *Noisomeness* of *Brimstone*, and the *Burning* of *Fire*; and on the other Side, when it would represent to us the *Happiness* of the *Blessed*, it does it by resembling the heavenly Joys, to such Pleasures as do here upon Earth most sensibly delight us; such as are the Pleasures of a spacious, rich, and commodious *Dwelling*, of the choicest *Delicacies* to please the Taste, of the rarest *Melody* to delight the Ear, of a *Crown*, and a *Kingdom*, and an *exceeding Weight of Glory*, and of whatever else can gratify or please any of our Senses.

Now tho' these Representations or Descriptions of Hell and Heaven are not perhaps to be understood literally; the Scripture herein speaking, not according to the Strictness of Truth, but according to our present Capacities and Apprehensions, who have now very little Notion of any Pain or Pleasure but what affect the Senses of our Body; yet thus much may most certainly be concluded from those Descriptions of these two States which we meet with in Scripture; that both the Torments of Hell and the Joys of Heaven, are as *great* as they can possibly be, far beyond any Thing that we now feel, or enjoy, or can have any Notion of; and in a Word, that as the *Pain* of Hell is *endless*, so it is likewise *intolerable*; and that as the *Joy* of Heaven is *perpetual*, so it is likewise *unspeakable and full of Glory*.

And now after this short, tho' very imperfect Representation of these two vastly different States of Men in that other and everlasting Life, that will begin when this is over; I think I may fairly ask again, what God could have done more, either to deter us from Sin, than to threaten *Hell-torments* to those that live in it; or to encourage us to Obedience, than to promise to those that continue in well doing, the unspeakable *Happiness* of *Heaven*? Certainly, if these *Motives* will not prevail upon us, no other can be proposed, that would prevail.

Nay farther; tho' I have hitherto spoken to you as to *Christians*, which believe the Scripture, and that there will certainly be another Life after this, even such a Life as I have been speaking of, an *everlasting Life* of *perfect Happiness*, or *extreme Misery*; yet if you have at all attended to, and are any whit affected by that Representation that I have made to you, of the *Pains* of *Hell*, and of the *Joys* of *Heaven*, and of the *Eternity* of both; I should now dare to address my self to you, even tho' I thought you believed very little of these Things; and methinks I should not doubt, but that I might prevail with you, and persuade you to *Repentance*, by these *Gospel-motives* of *Heaven* and *Hell*; even although the *Revelation* thereof were not *certain* and *undoubted*, altho' there were some *just Reason* to question the *Truth* of them.

For put the Case that it is very *uncertain*, whether there will be an *eternal Life* or no; nay, put the Case that it is ten to one, that it is much more probable, that there will not be any such Life after this; yet when we consider what *Eternity* is, and what a vast *Difference* there is between living in *perfect Joy*, and in *everlasting Burning*; and when we consider withal the *Shortness* of this present Life, and how *little* we can lose in it by abstaining from Sin, and how *little* we can suffer in it by the strictest *Holiness* and *Virtue*; even the bare *Possibility* that there will be an *eternal Life*, though we had no certain Revelation, and no other very good Assurance given us of it, would be abundantly *sufficient* to deter us from

Sin, and to stir us up to well-doing. For if we live well here, and there be really an eternal Life, it will be happy for us that we have made this Preparation for it; but if there should indeed be no other Life after this, we shall be then no Losers by what we have done, we shall be then in as good a Condition, as others will be in, who did not believe it, nor live in Expectation of it; and all that Trouble which the Exercise of Piety and Virtue now costs us, is not worth speaking of; it is no more than we ought in Reason and Prudence to be at, although at the same Time we believed it to be very uncertain, whether there would be any such eternal Life or no.

For this is what we call and account Wisdom in all other Cases; viz. to provide not only against Certainities or high Probabilities, but, when it may easily and conveniently be done, even against Possibilities too. We reckon him an unwise Man for the World, who being in a good Way of getting, spends all as fast as it comes in, when he has no present Need to spend so much; and lays up nothing against old Age, when, if he lives to it, he will be past his Labour, and not in a Capacity to get enough to support himself: And yet of all those that do wisely make some Provision for old Age, not one in ten perhaps lives to it. But nevertheless the bare Possibility that a Man may live to old Age, and the very great Inconveniencies that he will suffer, if he shall have nothing then to live upon, make it very adviseable for every one of the ten, to lay up somewhat, if he can do it, against that Time; and he, of the ten, whose only Lot it will be to live to be old, is not a wiser Man for making such Provision, than the other nine are, who yet, in the Event, will be never the better for their Labour.

Put case therefore, that there is the same, or even a much greater Uncertainty, whether there will be an eternal Life after this; yet when we consider what an eternal Life is; when we consider, that if there be a Heaven, and we can procure our Portion to be there, we shall be happy, infinitely and unspeakably happy, to eternal Ages; and that if there be a Hell, and we do not take Care to avoid it, our Lot will be extremely miserable, and we shall be tormented Day and Night, for ever and ever, in the Lakes that burn with Fire and Brimstone: And when we consider withal, the very little Trouble, in Comparison, that it will cost us to attain that, and to avoid this; that it is but the Labour of a few Years, and that the most we can suffer by it is the Loss of a little sensual Pleasure, for which after this Life is over we should be never the better; or the enduring of some little Pain or Hardship which will be soon over, and for which, if no good should ever come of it after this Life, we shall however be then never the worse: Considering, I say, thus the infinitely vast and wide Difference that there is between being eternally happy and eternally miserable, it is enough that it is possible, it is more than enough that it is probable, that there will be such a State; and if we neglect to make Provision for it, because we are not absolutely certain that it will be, it is plain, that we do not act so prudently in this, as we do in other Cases that are of infinitely less Moment and Concern to us; and that, as our Saviour says, *The Children of this World, are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.* Luke xvi. 8.

Now this is the most that the professed Atheists or Infidels can pretend; they will say perhaps, that for their own Parts, they do not believe the Being of a God, or a Judgment, or a Life to come; and that they do not see any good Reason to believe these Things; forasmuch as all the Proofs that are brought for them, do in their Judgment fall short of Demonstration; and they are resolved not to believe them, till such Proof thereof shall be offered, as they can make no Exception against; not till they see with their

their own Eyes that there is a Heaven and a Hell, or till they shall have a Messenger sent to them from thence, on Purpose to assure them thereof. And be it so as they say, that there is not an absolute Certainty of the Truth of these Things, that we have not yet such a sure Proof of them, as ocular or mathematical Demonstration would be; yet this is the most they can say, they themselves cannot pretend that there is any Demonstration on the other Side. They are not sure, they say, that there will be *another Life*, or that it will be *everlasting*: Well, but are they sure that there will not be such a Life? Is it absurd or impossible that there should be such a Life? This I am sure they cannot say: And all that they have yet dared to say, is only that those *Proofs* thereof, that we rely upon, are not, in their Opinion, *sufficient*.

But suppose them as *insufficient* as they can think them; yet still, if they are not *sufficient* to prove the *Certainty*, they may be *sufficient* to prove the *Probability* of what they are brought to prove; or if not so, yet still a future Life, if it be not *certain*, nay if it be not *probable*, however may be *possible*; and if it be only *possible* that we may *live for ever*, and that we may be *eternally happy*, or *eternally miserable*; this *Possibility* alone, considering what an infinite Difference there is between these two States, ought in reason to put us upon taking the best Care we can, that if there be an eternal Life, we may be eternally happy in it.

But after all, our Proof of this and other great Truths of our Religion, is not so very weak and slender as these Men would represent it: It is indeed as good as the Nature of the Thing will bear; and he is an unreasonable Man that requires a better Proof of any Thing than it is capable of.

This therefore is what I should now in the next Place proceed to do; *viz.* (3.) To shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give *Credit* to the *Scripture*, wherein these Truths are plainly taught. But this being too large a Subject to be handled now, I have already said, I would defer it to the next Opportunity.

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DIS

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation.

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DISCOURSE XC.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation ;

As to the *Proof* of it. PART I.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



HAVING in my first Discourse on these Words, endeavoured to shew in general, that a *standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well *contrived* and so well *attested* as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate ; I came the last Time to consider, whether *that standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be such a Revelation ; or whether there be not some particular *Defects* in it, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as it is possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be as I said, either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it ; and if in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give *sufficient Directions* what to do, or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I propounded to shew,

(1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do.

Vol. II.

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(2.) That

(2.) That the *Motives* which it proposes are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires: And,

(3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And the two first of these I have already done: I proceed now to the third, *viz.*

(3.) To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it; and that I shall presume to be *sufficient Reason* in this Case, which we readily accept and allow of as *sufficient* in all other Cases of the like Nature.

And I suppose that it will be granted, that we have *sufficient Proof* given us of the *Truth* of the Things contained in *Holy Scripture*, and of the *Authority* of it, if it can be shewn, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded. And 3. That if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *Scripture* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and divine *Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

These Things therefore I shall now endeavour to make good.

But in speaking to this Point, I shall, for Brevity's sake, confine my Discourse only to the *Books of the New Testament*; partly because these are the *Books* wherein our *Christian Religion* is chiefly taught; and especially because I think there are none who receive the *New Testament* as of divine *Authority*, that do, or indeed can, with any Reason reject the *Old*.

1. Then, I am to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe, that the *Books of Holy Scripture*, of the *New Testament* in particular, were written by those *Persons* that are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

This indeed is a Point that it does not properly lie upon us to make any Proof of: For as a Man's *Possession* of an Estate, is alone a good and a *sufficient Title* to it, till a better is shewn by the Person that endeavours to eject him; so it is here: These *Books* are generally received as written by such and such *Persons*; these *Authors* have the *Name*, these have as it were the *Possession* of them; and that is Title enough, if no other could be produced, so long as no Evidence is offered to shew that any other *Persons* have a better Title to them. It lies on them therefore who deny that the *Books* are theirs, to give a Reason of what they say; either by alleging some *special Matter* out of the *Books* themselves, whereby it may be proved that they could not be of their Writing, or by producing some credible and authentick *History* testifying that they were written by some other *Persons*, and not by them. And till they can, and shall do this, which I am persuaded can never be done, we may very well refuse to produce any positive Evidence to affirm or prove their Title; their *Possession* being a good Title enough, till a better appears: And a Tenant might with as good Reason refuse to pay Rent to the Person, of whom he took the Estate, and to whom he hath ever hitherto paid Rent, and whose Right to it is not at all controverted, until he shall suffer his Writings to be perused and examined, and by them make it plainly appear that he is the lawful Landlord; as any Man can now refuse to give that Credit to these *Books*, as written by the *Apostles*, which has been given hitherto, and is still given by all *Christians*, unless he may have now as good positive Evidence

of their being written by the *Apostles*, as might have been given thereof at first, and as, it may be presumed, was given, before their Title to them was so universally acknowledged.

But nevertheless, what a Man is not under any Obligation to do for the asserting of his Right, he may do wisely enough for his own Satisfaction. And it must needs be a Satisfaction and Pleasure to a Man, altho' his Title to his Estate be not at present controverted, if in looking over the Writings and Evidences of it, he sees plainly how it descended to him by a lineal Succession from Father to Son for many Generations past; and how it came at first to his Ancestors, by a clear and fair Purchase from the former Possessors, or by Donation from the Prince, in the Division of a waste or conquered Country; and if he also finds antient *Terriers* agreeing in the same Measure and Boundings, and exactly describing the same Estate which he now possesses; and if moreover, looking far back, he sees, that upon some Disputes or Law-suits that have been formerly concerning it, Judgment has been always given on his Side: It cannot but please him, I say, that upon such a Search into Antiquity, he finds that he is so very well provided to make out his Title, if there should ever be any Occasion for it; altho' by Reason of the long and quiet *Possession*, that he, and his Ancestors before him, time out of Mind, have had of it, he has no just Cause to fear he shall ever meet with any Disturbance.

And so it is here: These Writings, *the Books of the New Testament*, are generally *acknowledged* to be written by the *Apostles of Christ*, and their Authority is at present uncontested; it may therefore reasonably be presumed, especially by those who have not Parts or Learning or Leisure to examine into the Reasons of such Things, that they would not have been so universally acknowledged and revered as they are upon this Account, but upon very good Grounds; tho' what the Grounds thereof are, they have not yet inquired. Their being in *Possession* is alone Reason enough to acknowledge and assert their Title: It lies upon them that *deny* these *Books* to be *theirs*, to *produce* satisfactory *Evidence* of their being *forged* or *counterfeit*; and till they shall produce some Evidence thereof that has a Shew and Appearance of Truth, we have no Reason to be staggered in our Belief by their bare, however bold and confident, Denial of their Authority; much less shall we need to give our Reasons for our receiving them as written by the *Apostles*, till our Adversaries shall offer some Reasons why we ought not to receive them as such.

But nevertheless, because we see there are some, in this incredulous Age, that shew a good Will to deny the Authority of these *sacred Books*, and whose Interest it would be to prove them *spurious*; and because we cannot tell what unwarrantable Practices their Inclination and Interest may put them upon, nor what Writings or Evidences, plausibly forged and counterfeited, they may hereafter produce: It cannot be amiss for us to enquire and see; and it cannot but be a Pleasure and Satisfaction to us, who hold our Hope of eternal Life chiefly by these Writings, to find, and consider, how well provided we are to detect and disprove any such Forgeries, if they should be offered, by being able to produce, in Opposition thereto, as good positive Proof that these *Books* are *genuine*, as such a Matter is capable of; much better than I believe can be produced for the Authority of any other Books of the like Antiquity.

And it gives us *some Satisfaction* in the Belief we have been bred up in, that *these* are the *genuine Books* of the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, to find that they are received as such, not by a small Party of Men, not by that Church and Nation only to which we belong, but by *all Christians* dispersed in *all Parts* of the World; and likewise that they *all* agree with

us in the same Testimony, *viz.* that they received them as such, from their Fathers. For that *these Books* should be thus generally received and acknowledged, by so many different and far distant Nations, without some good Grounds, is not conceivable; because it can neither be imagined that the *Christians* of the *present Age* dispersed in all Countries, should combine together to say that they received *these Books* from their Fathers, as the *genuine* Writings of the *Apostles*, if they had not so received them; nor that their *Fore-Fathers*, in any of the Ages past, should have all agreed together, to put a Cheat upon their *Posterity*, by delivering down to them *these Books* as written by the *Apostles*, when they themselves had no good Reason to believe them so, or when they knew the contrary.

It is a *farther Satisfaction* to us, to observe and consider, that the *Authority* of *these Books* is as well proved as it can be, not only by *oral*, but also by the best *written Tradition*: The *Christian Writers* of all Ages, citing them, as they had Occasion, as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*; and that, as well before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was defined and declared by *Councils*, as since.

And lastly, it gives a good *Satisfaction* that *these Books* are the *genuine Writings* of the *Persons* to whom they are ascribed, that we do not find they were ever *excepted* against, as *spurious* and *counterfeit*, in *those Times* when it would have been most proper to have made the Exception; and by *those Persons* whose Cause and Interest it would have served very much to have proved them *spurious*, if it could have been done.

For the proper *Time* to have made this *Exception* to *these Writings*, was *when*, or *soon after*, they were first published; when it would have been easy to have proved them *spurious* if they had been so, and no less easy to have brought positive Evidence of their being *genuine*, if indeed they were *genuine*, either by the living Testimony of the Authors themselves, or of others that knew their Writing, or by producing the original Copies under their own Hands. And therefore *their* being *then received* as the *Writings* of the *Apostles*, by *those* who were best able to know whose Writings they were; and their being *not* (for ought appears) *excepted against*, upon this Account, at *that Time*, is a very good Argument that there was no just Ground for any such Exception.

And the most *likely Persons*, they whose Cause and Interest it would have served most, to deny that *these Books* were written by the reputed *Authors* thereof, were the Enemies of our Religion, the *Jews*, or the *Heathens*; who neither of them wanted either Malice or Wit, to allege any Fact that they could have justified the Truth of, in Disproof of the *Christian Religion*. It is therefore no small *Satisfaction* to us to observe, that *they* never argued against the *Christian Religion* from this Topick; that *they* never denied that the *Books* which the *Christians* received as written by the *Apostles* were *genuine*; nay, that *Julian* himself, one of the subtlest, as well as of the bitterest Adversaries of the *Christian Faith*, did yet expressly own, that the *Books* received by the *Christians*, as the Books of *Peter*, *Paul*, *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, were indeed *theirs*.

After all indeed it must be owned, that we have not such Demonstration that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *Apostles*, as is self-evident, and cannot possibly be contradicted; for the Matter it self is not capable of such Demonstration: But we have such Demonstration of it as cannot be contradicted with any Reason; we have as good Assurance of it as we have, or can have, of any Matter of that Kind; we have as good Evidence of the Truth of it, as, supposing it to be true, we could have of it; and more than this cannot be desired. We are as *morally certain*, that *these Books* were written by the *Authors* to whom they are

ascribed, as we are that any other antient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there being no Argument, by which it is, or can be proved, that any antient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it, which does not prove the Authority of *these Books*, rather more strongly, than it does the Authority of any other Book; and there being no Argument that is, or can be urged, against the Authority of *these Books*, which may not, with as good Reason, be urged, to disprove the Authority of any other Book of the like Antiquity, nay indeed, of all the Books in the World, antient or modern, the Authors of which are not now living, or of whose Writing the Books ascribed to them no living Evidence can be produced.

For what is there that can be said to disprove, or to render suspected the Authority of these Books, but only that there is a *Possibility* that Things may not be as we believe them to be? It *may be*, the *Atheist* or *Infidel* will say, that these Books were *not written* by the *Persons* under whose Names we receive them, but by *some others*: It *may be*, he will say, for Instance, that there never was such a Man as *Matthew the Publican*, afterwards an *Apostle of Christ*; or if there was, yet it *may be*, that the *Gospel* that goes under his Name was *not* of *his* Writing, but is a Book of a much later Date; it *may be*, that it was written by some *crafty Priest*, no longer ago than the *last Age*, and that he and some others in Confederacy with him, at the same Time that they forged this *Gospel* in the *Greek Tongue*, did likewise make and contrive all those *Translations* of it into several Languages that are now extant, some of which pretend to very great Antiquity, and which are all made with such an Appearance of Truth, and with such Congruity to the several Times in which they are said to be made, that none of the learned Men of the present Age have been able to discover the Fraud: And, it *may be* also, that when they forged the *Gospel* it self, they forged likewise all the *other Books*, that are pretended to be written by several *Historians* and *Divines*, in diverse Languages, and in several Ages of the World, for sixteen hundred Years past, in which this *Gospel* is either testified to be written by *St. Matthew*, or is cited or commented upon as *his*; and it *may be* likewise that at the same Time, that they trumped up all these Books in one Country, they had their Confederates and Correspondents that did the same in all the other Countries where they are now found; not only exposing them to *publick Sale* as Books of antient Date and venerable Antiquity, but likewise sily conveying an infinite Number of written and printed Copies of the same into all *Libraries*, both publick and private, unknown to the *Keepers* and *Owners* thereof; and it *may be* that all these Things were done so *secretly*, that none of the Confederacy did ever confess, nor any besides ever discover the Cheat; and it *may be* that all the rest of the World was so much *asleep* at that Time, as to have no Suspicion of what was done, nor any Sense of that great Alteration that had been made in the World by these Books, nor any Remembrance, afterwards, when they awoke and found themselves *Christians*, that they had been of some other Religion before, when they were first taken with that *lethargick Fit*.

But if such Things *may be*, what is there of this Kind that *may not be*? If the World be so much mistaken in this Matter, it may be as much mistaken in any other Matter of the like Nature. And then, it *may be*, that there never was such a Man as *Homer*, or *Virgil*, or *Cesar*, or *Cicero*, or *Plutarch*, or any other of those Persons, as whose Writings we now receive the Books that go under their Names; but that all the Books pretended to be written by those Authors, and likewise all the Books of la-

ter Date, whereby the Authority of those former Books is attested, were in like Manner contrived, and made and dispersed, by such another Gang of crafty and designing Knaves, who took a Pleasure in abusing the rest of the World, or hoped to make a Gain to themselves thereby.

Nay then, (for why should we stop here ?) it *may be*, that not only the *Laws* of our *Religion*, but the *Laws* of our *Civil State* too, are all *forged* and *counterfeit*; it *may be*, that once upon a Time, the *Keeper* of the *publick Records*, having by much and long Observation attained to good Skill in the ancient Ways of Writing for many Ages backward, and being a complete Master of his Pen, and having also gotten an Art to make a fresh Writing seem just as old as he had a Mind it should be thought to be, did compose, and deposit in their proper Places, those *original Acts* of *Parliament*, which are now taken to be the *Laws* of some of our former *Kings*; and that to confirm and establish his Fraud, he procured some other Persons at the same Time to write or print, and to convey into all *Shops* and *Libraries*, several Books of *Reports* and *Pleadings*, wherein these counterfeit *Acts* were cited and referred to; and it *may be* that while this was doing, none else had their Eyes open to see it, nor had ever after the least Suspicion of what was done; or if they had, yet that they were so well pleased with the Cheat, which they thought would be a good Means of preserving Peace and Justice in the Nation, as to be willing it should pass to Posterity undiscovered. These *may be's* are I am sure every whit as possible and as likely as the other.

Either therefore let those Men who upon this Account doubt the Authority of the *Books* of the *New Testament*; or who would make others doubt of it, only by suggesting that it is a Thing *possible* in Nature, that they *may be* all *forged* and *counterfeit*; let them, I say, either entertain and suggest the same Doubt concerning all other ancient Books, of the Antiquity and Authority of which there is no greater Evidence than there is of these; and then they will render themselves so justly ridiculous to the World, that there will be no Need to expose their Folly; for then they must call in Question the Authority of all Books, and the Truth of all History: Or else let them fairly own, that the true Reason of their making a Doubt concerning *these Books* rather than concerning *others*, is because they do not relish the Matter of them; because they find it easier to *resist* that strong Evidence that is given of the *Authority* of *these Books*, than they do to govern their Lives according to those strict Rules of Holiness and Purity that are therein prescribed, and to bring their Wills to the *Obedience* of *Faith*. And if they will but own this, which I believe is the Truth, their Prejudice and Partiality will be so evident to all, that it may reasonably be hoped, their impious Suggestions will do but little Harm in the World; and that few Men of any Sense or Reason will be so fool-hardy as to venture their Souls, and run the Hazard of a miserable Eternity, upon so many, and such very improbable, I had almost said such impossible *may be's*, as must be supposed to have been, if indeed *these Books* are forged and counterfeit, if indeed they were not written by those *Persons* whom they are commonly ascribed to.

But yielding this Point, may the *Atheist* or *Infidel* farther say, *viz.* that the *Gospel* called *St. Matthew's* was written by *St. Matthew*; and *that* of *St. Mark* by *St. Mark*, and the *rest* of the *Books* which are ascribed to any other *certain Authors*, by those *Persons* to whom they are severally ascribed; yet the Authority of the whole *New Testament* will not, by this Concession, be sufficiently established. For of *some Books* of the *New Testament* the *Authors* are *not known*, of *others* they are *doubted*; *some Parts*

of this Book that are now received have been *rejected* in ancient Times, and *others* not *universally* received: And besides, it is certain, that in the early Times of Christianity there were several *counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, some of which may possibly have slipped into the *Canon* unawares. And lastly, if it be granted that *all* the *Books* of the *New Testament* were *originally* written by the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, yet however the Books that we now have are but *Copies*, in which many *Alterations* may have been made by *designing Men*, or *careless Transcribers*.

These Objections, or Cavils rather; for such I am sure they would be accounted in any other Case; against the Authority of these sacred Books, have been urged by some Men both anciently and lately; but they have been also so well and fully answered by those learned Persons that have written in Defence of the *Canon*, that I once thought to have taken no Notice of them; and I believe I had not done it, but that I considered on the other Hand, that when an old Objection that has been answered an hundred Times is urged afresh, a great many may take it for a new one, and if it be not quickly answered, may be apt to think it unanswerable; so that in this Case it may be better to repeat the same Answer, if it be a good one, that has been often formerly made to it, than to say nothing. And besides, in this degenerate Age, in which any wild or atheistical Discourse passes for Wit, it may be the Hap of some particular Persons, who have not much Mind, or Leisure, or Opportunity to read Books, to hear these Things in Conversation, and not knowing readily what Answers to make to them, to be somewhat staggered in their Belief thereby; especially if they be such whose loose and licentious Way of living makes them easy to receive, without Examination, any Notions that may give them Ease or Encouragement in Sin.

For these Reasons therefore I thought it would not be amiss, (especially because it is a Matter properly belonging to the Subject I am now upon, and because I have some Time left for it) to mention, as briefly as may be, the Answers that have been usually given to these Objections.

And, 1. Whereas it is said, that of *some* of the Books of the *New Testament* the Authors Names are *not* certainly *known*, as namely of the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*; and that of others, the *Authors* have been doubted, particularly of the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*: To this it hath been answered,

1. That the Credit and Authority of a Book depends many Times much more upon the good Assurance that we have of the *Time*, when it was written, and of the *Character* of the Person that wrote it, than upon the certain Knowledge of his *Name*. It is therefore a Matter of no great Consequence, whether the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* was written by *St. Paul* himself; as is commonly, and upon very probable Grounds, believed; or, Phil. iv. 3. as some have conjectured, by *St. Luke* his constant Companion; or, Acts xiv. 1. as others, by *St. Clement* his Fellow-labourer, whose Name was in the *Book of Life*; or, as others, by *St. Barnabas* his Assistant in preaching the Gospel, who is dignified by *St. Luke* with the Title of an *Apostle*. And so, neither is it very material whether the *Epistles* called the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*, and commonly believed to be written by the same Person that wrote the first, were indeed written by *St. John* the *Apostle* and *Evangelist*, or as some have thought, by another *John*, who was made Bishop of the *Jewish Christians* at *Ephesus*, by him; for it is sufficient that the Writers of these Books, which soever they were of the Persons before-mentioned, were of good Ability and Integrity, and well instructed in that Doctrine and Religion which they wrote about; and of this, besides

besides the Testimony of the Ancients, there is good Evidence enough in the Writings themselves.

2. In Answer to this, and all other Objections of this Sort, against *these*, or any *other Books*, or *Chapters*, or *Paragraphs* of the *New Testament*, it hath been farther truly said, that there is nothing *singular* in *these Books*; that there is no Doctrine of Christianity taught in any Part of the *New Testament*, of the Author or Authority of which there hath ever been any Doubt in the Church, which is not taught in some other undoubted and uncontroverted Part of the same Book. So that if it were granted that those Parts of the *New Testament*, of which there has been formerly any Doubt were still of uncertain Authority, our Christianity would suffer no real Loss thereby; only giving up these controverted Places we should sometimes want a good Help to enable us to understand readily those other uncontroverted Places of the *New Testament*, wherein the same Doctrines are, but perhaps more briefly or obscurely, delivered.

2. Whereas it is said, that *some Parts* of the *New Testament* have been *rejected* in ancient Times; this is granted: But then it hath been shewn, that, considering by *whom* they have been rejected, and under what *Notion*, and for what *Reasons* they were rejected, this Objection is of no Force to invalidate the Authority even of *those Parts* of the *New Testament* which have been so rejected; and much less of the *rest* of the *Book* which has been *allowed* by all.

Thus, *some Portions* of the *New Testament* have been rejected by *Heretics*, because they contradicted their private and singular Notions; some by *Judaizing Christians*, as the two first *Chapters* of St. *Matthew*, because they were not found in that *Hebrew Copy* of that *Gospel* which they used; and all the *Epistles* of St. *Paul* were likewise rejected by the *same Persons*; but not, as *not* written by St. *Paul*, but only because they were written by *him*, whom they looked upon as an Enemy to their Nation, because he levelled them with other Nations, and as too averse to that Religion which had been introduced by *Moses*, which they continued so wedded to, even after their embracing Christianity, that they could not but suspect him to be a *false Apostle*, who had so plainly taught the Abrogation thereof. And for the like Reasons *some other Parts* of the *New Testament* have been likewise *rejected* by some few Men; that is, not because they wanted the same Attestation which the other Parts of it had, or because it appeared by credible History that they were *spurious*, but only because they contradicted too plainly some Notions which their former Prejudices, or Education had made them fond of. So that this Argument against the Authority of the *New Testament*, taken from the *Rejection* of *some Parts* of it, by some particular *Men* or *Sects*, is manifestly of no Strength, unless there was some *good Reason* for their rejecting them; and that there was *good Reason* for it, has not yet been shewn; but the contrary has been shewn very plainly by the *ancient Writers* of the *Church*, in several Books, written by them in Confutation of those *Sects* and *Heresies*, which are still extant.

And 3. Whereas it is farther said, that *some Books* which are now received as *Parts* of the *New Testament*, were not *universally* received in the most early Times, when their Authority, if they were authentick, might have been asserted upon more certain Grounds than it can be now; *viz.* the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of St. *James*, the second of St. *Peter*, the second and third of St. *John*, the *Epistle* of St. *Jude*, and the *Book* of the *Revelation*; this is likewise granted: But in Answer to it, it is said;

1. That

1. That there is good Evidence from Antiquity, that these *controverted Books* were received in the most early Times, by those who had the best Opportunity of satisfying themselves of the Authors and Authority thereof, viz. by those to whom they were sent, and in general by the whole *Greek Church*.

2. That it is no Wonder, that *these Books*, being written either to *Christians dispersed*, and consequently only published by giving out Copies thereof to some, to be communicated, as there was Opportunity, to others; or else to *private Persons*, living perhaps at great Distance from the Places from which they were sent; were not so easy to be attested, and upon that Account were not at first so generally received, as the others were, which were either written to particular Churches, to which the Authors Hands, and the Messengers that brought them were well known; or which were first published and received in the same Places where they were written. And,

3. That even *those Churches* which did for some Time *doubt* of the Authority of *these Books*, were persuaded at last to receive them as the *authentick Writings* of the *Apostles*, or other inspired Men. If therefore it be supposed, that while they doubted of these Books, they had *Reason* for their Doubt; that is, that they did it, because they were not as yet fully satisfied that they were *Apostolical Writings*, which the Objectors, I believe, will readily enough grant; it may be very reasonably presumed, that they had afterwards *greater Reason* to lay aside their Doubt; and that when they did receive them, it was, because there had been then lately such Evidence and Attestation given of their being written by the *Apostles* or other inspired Men, as they had not heard of before, such as they could not then, with any Reason, contradict or gainsay. For ordinarily a less Reason will persuade a Man to take up an Opinion at first, than will persuade him to go back from an Opinion, how weakly soever grounded, which he has before embraced and defended. So that this Objection is so far from lessening, that it rather strengthens the Proof we have of the Authority even of *these once controverted Books*; and it is, besides, a very good corroborating Evidence of the Authority of *all the other Books* of the *New Testament*. For the *Backwardness* of some Churches to receive these *controverted Books* at first, when they had nothing to object to the Matter of them, makes it evident, that the *Christians* of the first Ages were not so very easy and credulous as some have represented them; that they did not so very greedily swallow any Book for divine Revelation that contained a great many Miracles, mixed with a few good Morals, without making due Enquiry concerning the Author and Authority thereof. But on the contrary, their being so hard to be persuaded to receive *these controverted Books* for some Time, while they wanted, as they thought, sufficient Attestation, altho' the Doctrine of them was in all Points agreeable to the Doctrine of the other Books which they had before received; their being so hard, I say, to receive *these Books*, of the Authority of which there nevertheless really was such Evidence, as they themselves, after having well weighed and considered it, declared themselves satisfied with, gives very good Ground to believe, that they had from the Beginning, such Evidence as was without Exception, of the Authority of *all those other Books*, that is, of much the greatest Part, of the *New Testament*, which were never controverted, which were from the first, and with universal Consent, received by all Christian Churches; for if there had not been very undeniable Evidence of *their* being the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, there

would certainly have been the same Doubt and Controversy concerning *them*, that there once was concerning *these*.

But, fourthly, it hath been farther objected, that in the early Times of Christianity, there were several *counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, which passed among some for the *Writings* of the *Apostles*; and that it is possible, some of them may have slipped into the *Canon*, unawares to the first *Christians*, who, by all the Accounts of those Times, were more remarkable for their *Honesty* and *Simplicity* and *Zeal*, than for their extraordinary *Parts* and *Learning*.

But this Objection, (granting the Matter of Fact alleged in it to be true) is so far from *lessening*, that it rather *adds* to that *reasonable Assurance* that we have, that *all* the *Books* of the *Canon* are true and *genuine*. For there is nothing so apt to put Men upon using *Caution*, as a great *Probability* of *being cheated*, if they be not cautious. Thus, when the *Coin* is generally good, and there is very little base or counterfeit Money stirring, Men commonly take it by *Tale*, without examining the *Weight* and *Purity* of every *Piece*; and so may more easily have a single Piece of lighter Weight or baser Metal put upon them without discerning it: But if the *Coin* be much corrupted, they look more *narrowly* upon every *single Piece* of Money that they take, and if there be the least Cause to suspect it, make *Trial* of it by the *Scale* or *Touchstone*, before they accept it as good. If therefore there were in the early Times of Christianity many *counterfeit Pieces* given out, and perhaps received by some as written by the *Apostles*, and which were some of them *discovered* to be *spurious*; and there is not greater Evidence from Antiquity, that there were any such *spurious Writings*, than there is that the *Spuriousness* of some of them was soon *discerned*; this could not but put the *Christians* of those Times upon examining more strictly, what Evidence and Attestation there was that those other Books were true and genuine, which had been generally received as such. So that the *more* there were of these *spurious* and *counterfeit Books*, so much the *more* assured and confident we may reasonably be, that none but such as were *undoubtedly true* and *authentick*, and very *well attested*, were admitted into the *Canon*; and, of the two, it is much more probable, that they did, for want of *clear Attestation*, *refuse* to admit some Books that had been written by the *Apostles*, than that they did, without *sufficient Attestation*, *admit* any that were not.

And that the *Christians* of those early Times, who had the best Means and Opportunities of satisfying themselves whether any Book, given out as written by an *Apostle*, was so or not, wanted not Skill to *discern* between a *true* and *spurious* Writing; as is maliciously suggested by some Men; is abundantly evident, from those *Monuments* of the excellent Parts and Learning of *some* of the first *Converts* to *Christianity*, which are still extant in their Books; and from the Testimony that is therein given to the like good Ability of several others, who were famous in their Generation, for their preaching and writing, and for their stoutly maintaining the Truths of Christianity both against *Infidels* and *Hereticks*, but whose Books are now unhappily lost.

But fifthly, and lastly; it was farther said, that though it be granted that *all* the *Books* of the *New Testament* that are now received, were *originally* written by the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, yet *those* which we now have are but *Copies*; in which, by so many *Transcriptions* thereof as must have been in about fourteen hundred Years, many *Alterations* may have hapned, through the *Ignorance*, or *Oversight*, or *evil Design* of the *Transcribers*;

scribers; and that several *Changes* have been made, is undeniably plain, by the *various Readings* that have been observed in comparing the best *Manuscript Copies*, that are now, or have been extant since Printing began; so that we cannot be sure whether any particular *Passages* now found in *these Books* are the very *Words* of an *Apostle*, or of some ignorant or careless *Scribe*. But to this it hath been answered;

1. That so far as this Objection is of any Force, it invalidates the Credit of all History, and of all other Books of ancient Date, as well as of the *New Testament*; nay, indeed of all other Books, much more than of *this*; for the *faithfully transcribing* whereof, it may reasonably be presumed, there was formerly greater Care taken, as there is now for the *correctly printing* it, than there ordinarily was of other Books that were of less Consequence.

2. That though it be certain that some *Hereticks* have *attempted* to corrupt the *Text* of the *New Testament* in some Places, and have made Changes in some *few Copies* thereof; it is almost as certain that their Attempts of this Kind neither have nor ever could amount to a Corruption of *all* the *Copies* thereof that were generally in Men's Hands; in which there is even to this Day an admirable *Agreement* in all Matters of Moment. And from that general Agreement that always was in *all* the *Copies* of this Book, except those *few* that were sometimes corrupted by *Hereticks*, to serve a Turn, their Attempts of this Kind have been always rendered successful; and those false Doctrines, that were justified only by their own false Copies of this Book, solidly confuted.

3. It is farther answered, that not only there is no Evidence that there has been, but that it is morally impossible that there should have been a *general Depravation* of the *Copies* of *this Book*, either designedly, or by Chance, in *any Place* of great Consequence, in either Point of *History* or *Doctrine*. For *when* was it possible that this Corruption should be? Was it in the Copies that were given out, *in* the Days of the *Apostles*, and while they were *living*? This cannot well be supposed; or if it had been done *then*, it cannot be thought but that the *Authors* of these *Books*, being *living*, would have taken Care to have had such false Copies of their Books suppressed, or well corrected; or at least have given publick Notice, in order to their Correction of those Faults that had been committed in the transcribing, which did either obscure or spoil their Sense.

Was it then in the *Times* immediately after the *Apostles* were dead? But neither could this be; for by this Time an infinite Number of true Copies had been made and dispersed in all Parts of the *Christian Church*; and besides the *Autographs* of the Books themselves were then probably *all* in being: For *Tertullian*, who lived in the third Century, witnesses that some of them were extant and to be seen even in his Time; so that by comparing the *new false Copies* with the *ancient true ones*, or with the *Originals* themselves then extant, the Fraud would have been quickly discovered, or the Mistake easily rectified.

Was it then in the *Times* after *this*, when the *Originals* were *lost* or *worn out*? This was still less possible: For by this Time not only a greater Number of true Copies thereof, in the *Original Greek*, were *dispersed* and in the Hands of all *Christians*; but several *Translations* thereof had been likewise made into other *Languages*, several *Commentaries* had been written thereupon, and the most *material Passages* thereof had been occasionally *cited* by the *Christian Writers* of those or the foregoing Times.

And

And the farther we go on downwards, it was still, for such Reasons as have been given already, more impossible that the Copies of this Book should be *generally corrupted* in any Place or Matter of Moment; as well as more likely that there should be every Day an Increase of such *small and literal Mistakes*, as could hardly be avoided by the greatest Care and Faithfulness. And these are the *various Readings* before spoken of; concerning which, and in Answer to the before-mentioned Objection, so far as it is grounded upon *them*, it is farther said,

4. In the fourth Place; that *they* are no *other* than such as are to be met with in comparing the *Manuscripts* of all other Books; that these *various Readings*, if they be compared together with Judgment, are more like to lead us to understand the true Meaning of the Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense; it being very probable that when there are *several Readings*, one of them is the *right*, and easier by their Help, to rectify the Mistakes that may have been made in some Copies, than it would have been, if all Copies had agreed in the same Mistake. And lastly, that it is hardly, in any Place of which there are such *various Readings*, very *material* which is the true Reading; there being no Point that is of the *Substance* either of the *History* or *Doctrine* of Christianity, that is grounded upon *any Text*, of which there are, in different Copies, *various Readings*, but which may be proved by some *other Texts*, in the Reading whereof all Copies do agree.

5. And lastly, in Answer to this Objection, that the *Text* of the *New Testament* is depraved and *corrupted*, and consequently of uncertain Authority, it is farther said; that supposing these Books to be written by the *Apostles*, and by *divine Direction* and *Inspiration*, which must be supposed, or at least, for Argument sake, be allow'd, by those that make this Objection; or else the Objection is trifling; it is by no Means credible, that the same *Goodness* of God which took Care for the writing, has not likewise taken Care for the *preserving* of these Books, so free at least from *Corruption*, that they may be *sufficient* to answer the Ends for which they were written; that is, fully to instruct Men in all Points of *Christian Faith* and Practice, to *make them wise unto Salvation*, and *thoroughly to furnish them unto all good Works*.

And now from all that hath been said, I hope it appears, that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* whose *Names* they bear, or to whom they are ascribed, *viz.* by the *Apostles* of *Christ*, or other inspired Men; which was the *first Thing* I was to make good.

Whether there be *sufficient Reason* to give them Credit in the *Matters* of *Fact* which they have related; and whether the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* be well proved by the *History* of it, shall, God willing, be hereafter enquired.

In the mean Time, supposing their Testimony to be credible, what has been said upon this first Head may serve to shew, in some Measure, the Unreasonableness of those Men, who are not satisfied with the *Scripture Revelation*.

For I believe there are few that have heard any Thing of the *Manner* of the first Preaching of the *Gospel*, but who think, that they that lived in those Times, and heard the *Apostles themselves*, had *sufficient Reason* to receive their Testimony; and this, perhaps they will say, is what they could wish for themselves; *viz.* that they might have heard the *Apostles themselves*; or that they might *now* have as good and sure Grounds of Faith, as those had, who were converted to Christianity by the Preaching of

of the *Apostles*; which if they had, they make no Doubt but they should be, not only almost, but altogether such, as the *Primitive Christians* were, both in Belief and Practice.

But if they are not such now, it is much to be doubted, whether they would have been such, if they had lived then. For by what has been now said it appears, that the *Books of the New Testament*, being, as we have very good Reason to believe they were, written by the *Apostles* themselves, are their Words, their Sermons; that therein the *Apostles* themselves being dead, do yet truly speak to us the very same Things, though not just in the same Manner, that they spake before while they were living; and that their *Testimony written*, if indeed it be theirs, which I have shewn there is no Cause to doubt of, is as credible as their living *Testimony* was.

For in *Matters of common Testimony* we make little Difference between *Speech* and *Writing*. If a Man whom we dare trust sends us a *Letter*, and therein relates such and such Things, as heard or seen by himself, or as well attested to him by unexceptionable Witnesses, we give as full Credit to his *Letter* as we would do to his *Words*.

So that in Truth, our Case, who live now, is not very different from theirs who lived in the *Apostles* Days, and heard them saying those same Things, which we now read in their *Books*; and if we think those inexcusable, who did not receive their Testimony when given by *Word of Mouth*, we cannot in good Reason, hold our selves excused, if we receive not the same Testimony of the same Persons given under their Hands.

In one Respect indeed, it must be granted, that they had the Advantage of us; viz. because they might be surer that they heard an *Apostle* speak, than the Nature of the Thing will admit we should be, that we read the Words of an *Apostle written*: But we are sure enough of this; we have as good moral Certainty of it, as we can have of any Thing, that is not capable of any other than a moral Certainty: And if the Words that we read in the *New Testament* are the Words of the *Apostles of Christ*, we have, in some respects, the Advantage of those who lived in those early Times; for we have the concurrent Testimony of several of the *Apostles*, written; whereas hardly any in those Times, when a few Persons were to bear witness to all the World, could have more than the Testimony of one single *Apostle* only, by *Word of Mouth*; and many Witnesses are more credible than one. And besides, there being several Witnesses, their Testimony, if it be false, may be more easily proved so, by their Disagreement with one another, than the Testimony of one single Witness could be. And lastly, a *Writing*, which we may review, and read over as often as we will, and which we may take what Time we please to consider of, may be more thoroughly understood, and better digested, than a *Sermon* or *Discourse* only once spoken can well be.

But if it be granted that the Faith of the first Converts to Christianity, which came by Hearing of the *Apostles*, might be built upon more certain and infallible Grounds, than ours, that comes only by Reading, is; and some Reasons may perhaps be given hereafter, why it was fit it should be so; it is enough however, to render our Infidelity inexcusable, if the Grounds of Faith that we now have are very rational, if they are a sufficient Support for such a Faith as will enable us to please God, and to overcome the World.

And this may be farther said for our Comfort, and to make us easy and satisfied with those Grounds and Reasons of Faith, which are afforded to us by the written Testimony of the *Apostles* in the *Books* of the

New Testament; that as there is *more Certainty* in that *Belief*, if it may be called *Belief*, which is *grounded* upon *Demonstration*, or *infallible Evidence*; so there is *more Praise* and *Virtue* in that *good Disposition* of *Mind*, which makes us rest satisfied with *such Grounds* of *Faith*, as though not absolutely and infallibly certain, yet *cannot*, with any good Reason, be *denied* or *excepted against*; according to that saying of our *Saviour* to *St. Thomas*, in a like Case, with which I shall conclude; *Joh. xx. 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they*, (that is, they are more blessed, their Faith is more excellent and praise-worthy, and so will entitle them to a greater Reward) *who have not seen, and yet have believed.* *



DIS-

DISCOURSE XCI.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation;

As to the *Proof* of it. PART II.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



THE Point I entred upon the Proof of the last Time was this,

(3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And for the Proof of this, having, for Brevity's sake, confined my Discourse upon it to the *Books* of the *New Testament* only; the rather because the Authority of that being granted, the Authority of the *Old Testament* cannot reasonably be questioned; I propounded to shew, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe, that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relations* of those *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded. And, 3. That if the *Matters* of *Fact* related in the *New Testament* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And

And I hope enough was said the last Time, to shew that we have *sufficient Reason to believe*, that the *Books of the New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. What I am next to do, is,

2. To shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to these *Authors* in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded.

And I hope none of you that hear me, whom I presume to be all *Christians*, will take Offence at it, if now, while I am arguing this Point, I sometimes speak of the *Holy Evangelists*, with the same Freedom that might be used in speaking concerning any other *Authors*; and if I sometimes plead for no more Credit to be given to *them* in their *Relations*, than is fit and reasonable to be given to any other *Historian*, that was naturally as well furnished and qualified to write a true History as they were, and whose Fidelity and Veracity is as well attested and confirmed other Ways as theirs was. For you will consider, I hope, that my Business is now with *Infidels*, with whom we can argue only upon the Principles of common Reason: And though *we* who are *Christians* already, do believe, as one of the first Principles of our Religion, that these *sacred Writers* were *divinely* and *supernaturally assisted* in their Work, and that upon that Account they deserve much greater Credit in what they have written than other *Historians* do; yet this is what those who are yet *Infidels* will not allow; and in Disputation nothing is to be presumed on one Side; but what will be readily allowed by the other Party. So that the *divine Inspiration* of the *Evangelical Writers*, and the *supernatural Assistance* which *we* believe they had in their Writing, cannot as yet be regularly insisted upon as an Argument to gain them Credit: But it is what will easily be granted afterwards, when the Truth of their History shall be well established upon other Grounds; as I hope it will be in the following Discourse; and it is what may then serve to procure a *religious Respect* and *Reverence* to these *sacred Writings*, and to engage us to receive them, *not as the Word of Men, but, as they are in Truth, as the Word of God.*

1 Thess. ii. 13.

But this one Thing nevertheless I suppose I may presume, *viz.* that if the *Books of the New Testament*, the *Historical Parts* of it in particular, were written by those *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, which has been already proved, the *Matters of Fact* recorded by the *Evangelists* in *Writing* are the *same* which *they* and the other *Apostles* testified by Word of Mouth in their *Preaching*; for it cannot, I think, with any Reason be suspected that their *Preaching* and *Writings* were *disagreeable* to each other, because such Disagreement would most certainly have utterly destroyed the Credit of them both.

And this being supposed, I hope it will clearly appear, that there is abundantly *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to these *Writings*, if these following Things be considered;

I. If we consider the *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* that are recorded in the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament*, and of the *History* it self.

II. If we consider the good *Capacity* that the *Authors* thereof were in to *know* the *Truth* of the Things they have related.

III. If we consider the strong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information.

IV. If we consider the good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And,

†

V. Lastly,

V. Lastly, if we consider the *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their History by God *himself*.

I. I say the *Evangelical History* will appear to be highly *credible*, if, without any Regard as yet had to the Ability and Integrity of its Authors, we only consider the *Nature, Conditions, and Circumstances* of the *Matters* therein recorded, and of the *History* it self. Concerning which there are two Things especially that may be observed, 1. That the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *such* as might be *certainly known*. And 2. That they are *such*, and in *such manner related* by the *Evangelists*, that if their History of them had been *false*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the World.

1. First, I say the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *such* as might be *certainly known*; I mean, either by the *Historians* themselves, or by *those* from whom they had their Information. For,

1. They are, for the most Part, plain *Matters of Sense*, which those who were present at them could have no *Doubt* of, without *distrusting* their own Faculties of *Hearing* or *Seeing*; and which those who testified them might be as *certain* of the Truth of, as *we* can be of any Thing that we *hear* with our *own Ears*, or *see* with our *own Eyes*. For, thus, whether our *Saviour* gave out himself to be the *Messias* foretold by the *Prophets*; whether he *said* that he was the *Son of God*; and whether he *uttered* those other *Speeches* which the *Evangelists* have recorded as spoken by *him*, could not but be *certainly known* by the *People* who often heard him; and especially by his *Apostles* who constantly attended him.

And so likewise whether he *did* those many *wonderful Works* which the *Evangelists* have recorded of him, could not but be *known* by *those* that were *present* with him; they might be *certain* either that he *did* them, or that he *did not do* them. Thus for instance, it might be *certainly known* to *those* that first affirmed that he gave Sight to the blind, whether those Persons had been once blind, and whether afterwards they saw; and to *those* that witnessed that he gave Strength to the Cripples, whether the Men whom they said he wrought this Cure upon, had been lame or disabled in their Feet, Hands, or Body before, and whether afterwards they walked and had Strength like other Men; and to *those* that testified that he raised the Dead, whether the Persons said to have been raised by him, had been truly dead, and whether afterwards they lived.

But above all, his own *Resurrection*, which the *present Season* as well as the Wonderfulness and Importance of the Thing, obliges us to have a special Regard to, was a Thing that might be most *certainly known* to *those* that pretended to be *Witnesses* of it; they might be *certain* whether he had been once *dead*, and whether he *shewed himself alive after his Passion* by many *infallible Proofs*, and was *seen of them forty Days*. Of this they might be rather *more certain* than of any other of his Miracles, because it was a Thing not to be judged of by *one Sense* only, as some of the rest were, but by almost *all* their *Senses*; for by their *Sight* they might be assured that it was *he himself*, whom for more than three Years before they had been well acquainted with, whom they then saw with their Eyes; and by their *Hearing*, that it was *his own Voice* and not a Stranger's, that Voice which they had often heard, and which they well knew, that then spake to them; and by their *Touch*, that it was a *real Body* which they *saw* and *heard*, and not an *airy Apparition*, not a *mere Voice*: And also that it was *that very same Body*, which they had seen before hanging upon, and which they had taken down dead from the Cross, when they were permitted, as they say they were, to *handle* and feel him, to *put their Fingers*

This Sermon
was preached
on the Monday
in Easter Week.

Lu. xxiv. 32. *into the Print of the Nails, and to thrust their Hands into the Gash that*
 Joh. xx. 27. *had been made in his Side by the Spear that pierced his Heart.*

And of the *other Matters* recorded by the *Evangelists*, but not as *Matters* of their own Knowledge, *those* from whom they had their Information might have the *same Certainty* which *they* had of these Things. For his *Mother* could not but *know*, whether she had conceived him without Knowledge of a Man, and whether his Birth had been foretold her by an Angel; and *she*, and *her Relations*, and the whole *Neighbourhood*, might have a *certain Knowledge* of the Time, Place, and all other Circumstances of his Birth, as they are related in the Gospels.

They that testified such plain *Matters* of *Sense* as most of those are, which are recorded in the *Evangelical History*, could not but know, either that the Things which they testified were true, or that they themselves were egregious Liars when they testified them to have been so.

2. As the *Matters* recorded in the *Evangelical History* are chiefly *Matters* of *Sense*; of which, as such, the greatest Certainty and Assurance may be had, and in which any single Witness thereof may be very confident that he is not mistaken; so it may be also observed, that most of them are related as *Matters done* in the Sight, Hearing, or Presence of a *great many*; which *Circumstance* adds very much to that *Certainty* which any single Witness of such *Matters* may receive by his own Senses only.

For tho' it be a common Saying, that *seeing is Believing*, and we ordinarily desire no greater Assurance of the Truth of any Matter of *Sense*, than our own Sense and Perception of it; it is nevertheless no unusual Thing for a Man when he is relating somewhat that hapned that was very extraordinary and surprising, to say, that though he saw it himself, he could hardly believe his own Eyes. And this might well enough have been the Case of any one of the Witnesses of any of our *Lord's* Miracles, and especially of his *Resurrection*, the most wonderful of all his Miracles, and which gave Confirmation to all the rest; for tho' they were plain *Matters* of *Sense*, yet they were withal so very *strange* and *astonishing*, that if any Man had seen them *alone*, he might probably have had some *Distrust* even of his *own Senses*, or he might afterwards have been ready to *doubt* whether he had been well *awake* or in a *Dream*. But a Man cannot reasonably suspect that his own Senses do deceive him, when he perceives that the Thing appears to *all* others that are present, just as it does to him; nor can he afterwards so easily fancy that he was in a Dream, when he finds that *all* the rest that were there have the same Notion and Remembrance of the Thing that he himself has. So that by this *additional Evidence*, I mean by the *Agreement* that a Man finds there is between his own Senses and other Men's, he becomes *more certain* and *confident* of the Truth of the Things which he sees, than he would have been by his *own Eye-sight* only.

2. Secondly, the other Thing which I said might be noted concerning the *Matters* recorded in the *Evangelical History*, is, that they are *such* and in *such manner* related by the *Evangelists*; that if their History of them had been *false*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the World.

And this may in Part appear from what has been said already; for as there is nothing that can be more certainly known and attested than a plain *Matter* of *Sense* at which *several* are present; so there is nothing more *liable* to be *contradicted* and *easy* to be *disproved* than *such a Matter* is; in case it was not so done as it is reported to have been.

But there are several other Things that are here proper to be considered; for,

1. It may be considered, that the *Gospel History* comprehends a very great Number of Relations of such Matters of Fact and Sense; considering therefore how very easy it was to disprove every one of them if it had been false; it is most evidently morally impossible that a History stuffed with nothing else but Lies and Forgeries of this Sort; as they must suppose the *Evangelical History* to be, who will not allow it to be a true History; should ever have obtained any Credit: And most of these Things recorded by the *Evangelists*, being related by them as Matters of their own Knowledge; if the Falsity of only one single Relation had been made appear, the Credit of the whole History would have been thereby destroyed.

2. It may be also considered, that all these Things are related in the *Gospel History*, as done in that same Country in which the History thereof was first published; and that a Country but of small Extent, not above two hundred Miles in Length at the most, and not half so much in Breadth; and yet not all in the same Part of it, but some in one Place, some in another; and those usually the most considerable Towns or Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*. And by this, their History of these Things, if it had been false, was still more easy and liable to be disproved; there being very few of those to whom these Matters were first related, that needed to have gone many Miles from Home to have enquired into the Truth of some or other of them. And if any Man had found the *Apostles* false in their Report of any Matter that was said to have been done in his own Neighbourhood, he would hardly have gone farther for more Satisfaction; he would readily have concluded without farther Examination, that being found false Witnesses in one Thing, they were not fit to be believed in any Thing.

3. It may be moreover considered, that the *Gospel History* was written and published within a few Years after the Things therein recorded are said to be done. It is not certain indeed, in what Year precisely the *Gospels* were written; but if they are but allowed to be the genuine Writings of the reputed Authors; which I hope has been already sufficiently proved; it is certain they were all, even the latest of them, that of *St. John*, written before the Memory of the Things therein recorded could be worn out: Nay if we farther suppose, as I think we may do very reasonably, that the Things recorded by the *Evangelists* are the same which they and the other *Apostles* and *Disciples* of our Lord testified by Word of Mouth in their preaching, we may truly enough say that the History of the *Gospel* was begun to be published on that same Day on which the *Apostles* began to preach, viz. on the Day of *Pentecost*, ten Days after our Lord's Ascension; and that it was fully published in a very short Time after. So that most of the Things recorded in the *Gospels* are Things that had been done or had hapned in the Compass of less than four Years before the History thereof was first published, for it was not so long from our Lord's Baptism to his Ascension; and the earliest Things of all that are therein recorded, which are but few, and make but a small Part of the History, viz. the Birth of *St. John Baptist*, and of our Lord, and the Things that hapned about that Time, were Things done not above thirty five Years before at the most.

And the History of the *Acts of the Apostles*, which because it ends with *St. Paul's* Imprisonment at *Rome*, we may reasonably think was published about that Time, comprehends a History of some very remarkable Things, the very first and earliest whereof had not been done thirty Years before.

And

And this Consideration affords another very probable Argument of the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; because by this it still farther appears, how very easy it would have been to have disproved it, if it had been false; for it being an History of Things done so very lately, it must needs be that several of those, into whose Hands it first came, must have *certain Knowledge* whether some of the Things therein related had been so or not; and they who had not this *Knowledge*, might easily have had *certain Information*, from others, besides the *Apostles* and *Disciples* of our Lord, whether the Relations therein contained were true or false. Especially if it be considered farther, in the fourth Place;

The same may
be observed in
the Acts of the
Apostles.

4. That the *Facts* related in the *Evangelical History* are commonly related with all the *Circumstances* that were needful or proper to be noted, in order to the rendring an Enquiry into the Truth of them exceeding easy to such as had any Distrust thereof. For in the Account which the *Evangelists* give us of our Saviour's *Speeches*, they commonly tell us not only his Words, but likewise *when, where, to whom, and upon what Occasion* they were spoken; and in the Account that they give of his *Miracles*, they usually note the *Places* where they were done, and very often the *Names, or Characters* at least, of the *Persons* they were wrought upon; and sometimes they mention also *who* were by, and *Witnesses* thereof, and what *Discourse* concerning him was thereby occasioned: And in relating the Things that were done or hapned before our Saviour's Baptism, about the Time of his Birth, they carefully note the *Time, the Place, and other Circumstances*, whereby their *Readers* were, as it were, *challenged* to make Enquiry, and *desired* not to take Things only upon *their Credit*; and were also *directed* readily *whither* to go, and *to whom* to apply themselves, to obtain the fullest Satisfaction whether the Things they reported were so or not. And if all the Circumstances of every particular Story which they relate are not always so punctually set down, the Omission thereof sometimes is not of much Consideration; because it was so very easy by enquiring into the Truth of those many *other Stories* which are related with all Circumstances, for any Person to be satisfied whether their History in general deserved Credit or not; and whoever had found any *one* Story falsely reported by them, would hardly have troubled himself, at least not for his own Satisfaction, to have examined farther into the Truth of the rest.

Acts i. 21.

5. It may be farther considered, that most of the Things recorded by the *Evangelists* are related by them as Things that were *done* very *publickly*, as Things that were *well known* to a *great many*. For very few, in Comparison, of those *Discourses* of our Lord that are recorded by the *Evangelists*, were addressed in private to his *Apostles* only, but most of them were spoken in publick; his set Sermons commonly to great *Multitudes* gathered together on a *Mountain*, on the *Sea-shore*, or in a *Synagogue*; and the rest, most commonly in *Places* of *Resort*, in populous *Towns* or *Cities*, in *Jerusalem* or the *Temple*, when many were by to hear what he said. And his *Miracles* were *done* for the most Part in the best inhabited *Cities* of *Judea* and *Galilee*; or if in other Places, yet in the open *Day-light*, and commonly when there was a great *Crowd* of *People* about him; or if at any Time the Miracle it self was done privately, in an *House* or a *Chamber*, the *Effect* of the Miracle was usually very *visible*, and such as could not but be taken Notice of by a great many. And even of those few Things which were spoken or done by him most privately, there was *no Want* of *Witnesses*; there being, except very rarely, no fewer than *twelve* in constant Attendance upon him, and *several* others besides that *companied with them all the Time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them*.

†

And

And *this Circumstance* of the *Facts* recorded by the *Evangelists*, as it made them capable of better and more certain Attestation, being true; so it contributed no less towards the rendring it *easy* to *disprove* that Relation which they had given of them, if it had been false. For when a Man witnesses a Thing of his own private Knowledge, there may be no Way to invalidate his Testimony, but either by shewing that the Thing which he testifies was not possible, or by offering some just Exception to the Credit of the Witness: But when neither of these can be done; and they cannot always be done, altho' the Thing testified be false; yet in case the Matter was done *publicly*, it is the easiest Thing in the World to convict a false Witness by the *contrary Testimony* of several *others* that were present and as capable of knowing the Truth of the Thing as himself, or by the *clashing* of the *Witnesses* among themselves. Nothing therefore could have been more easy than to have disproved the *Evangelical History* in almost every particular of it, if it had not been true.

For most of our *Saviour's* Speeches and Miracles are related as spoken and done in the Presence not of his *Disciples* only, but of a great *many others* that *happened* to be by *Chance*, or that followed him, not for any liking that they had to his Person or Doctrine, but only out of *Curiosity*, or *for the Sake of the Loaves*; and very often they were done before *such* as came on purpose to *watch* what he said and did, with a Design to lay hold on any Occasion that was offered, to represent him to the People as an *Impostor*. Can it be supposed then that *these* were ignorant whether the Relation which the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* gave of these Matters was true or false? or can it be imagined that they would all have held their Peace? that not *one* of those many that could have done it, would have opened his Mouth to have convicted the *Apostles* of Falsity, if they had either in Word or Writing related any one of these Things otherwise than it had indeed been transacted? and if in any one of these Things, of which the *Apostles* pretended they had personal Knowledge, they had been found *false Witnesses*, their *Credit* would have been *ruin'd* for ever.

Nay if they had been found false in their Report of any of those *other Matters* which they left upon Record, of which they had not a personal Knowledge; though this indeed would not have been such a Proof of their Dishonesty, for any Man may very innocently be mis-inform'd; it would however have been such a plain Argument of their *foolish Credulity*, as would have *destroyed* their *Credit* no less than if they had been found in a known Lye. For these also were Matters of the same *publick Nature*; nay indeed they were rather more *publick* than the other; they were so very publick, that any Man with very small Trouble might have been fully satisfied whether they were true or not.

For thus, they tell us that our *Lord* was of the *Seed of David*; and it was a Matter of the greatest Consequence to the *Christian Religion* that he should be known to be so: How very easy was it at that Time, when the *Genealogies* of all the *Jewish Families*, and of the *Family of David* more especially, were kept with the greatest Carefulness and Exactness, for *them* to know this? and how very easy was it, for any one that doubted it, to have inspected the publick *Registers*, and seen whether it was so or not?

They tell us also several *Circumstances* of our *Lord's Birth*, and several *Accidents* that hapned about that Time; they tell us, for instance, that *Joseph* being of the *House and Lineage of David*, was forced with *Mary* his Wife, at a very inconvenient Time for her, being *great with Child*, to take a long Journey of about an hundred Miles, from *Nazareth* in *Galilee*, where their Habitation then was, to *Bethlehem* in *Judea*, the *City of David*, that so their Names might be *enrolled* with the rest of the Family

Luke ii. 1,
&c.

Matth. ii. 1.
&c.

* Ἀπογραφή.

of David, when Augustus Caesar had ordred a general Enrolment of the whole Jewish Nation. They tell us that then and there Jesus was born; that at the Time of his Birth certain Wise Men out of the East, conducted by a Star, came to Judea in quest of the Messias; that they informed Herod of the Design of their coming; that they were directed by the Council of the chief Priests and Scribes to look for him in Bethlehem; that Herod disappointed of the Design he had to kill this new-born King of the Jews, by their not returning back to him according to his Appointment, sent forth, and, that he might make sure work of it, slew all the Children in Bethlehem that were under two Years old; and several other Things they tell us of the like Kind, easy to be known if true, and no less easy to be disproved if false. For whether there had been such a Taxing or * Enrolment of the whole Nation of the Jews according to their Families, by the Order of the Emperor, could not but be well known to all the Jews; and the People of Nazareth could not but know, when Joseph went from thence, and whither he went, and upon what Occasion, and how long it was before he returned; and the People at Jerusalem could not but long remember the Story of the wise Men, at whose coming Herod and the whole City with him was so much troubled; and if there had been no such Thing, would readily have contradicted the Apostle's Relation of it; and the Mothers at Bethlehem which survived the Loss of their dear Children, could never after while they lived forget that general Mourning that there had once been amongst them, nor the Occasion of it. If therefore these and such like Things related by the Evangelists as Things publickly done, and much talked of, and of which, as they say, the Rumour was spread far and near, had not been so as they are related, their whole History would have been thereby so much disparaged, that no Part of it would ever have had much Credit.

1 Cor. xv. 6.

It is true indeed, there are some Things related by the Evangelists, that were not altogether so publick as those I have before mentioned; for there are some Things, of which, according to the Account that is given of them in the Evangelical History, none but the Disciples of Christ were Witnesses; such in particular was the Resurrection of our Lord, which we at this Time commemorate, and which is for that Reason most proper to be now instanced in. Of this then I say, as well as of some few other Things, it must be granted, that it was a Fact that could directly be witnessed only by his own Friends, by his Apostles and Disciples; for so St. Peter observes, speaking of this Matter, Acts x. 40, 41. Him God raised up the third Day, and shewed him openly, not to all the People, but to Witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the Dead. But nevertheless, considering how long, and how often he is reported to have appeared to them, and the many Circumstances that are noted concerning his several Apparitions, and the great Number of those whom he is said to have appeared to; for St. Paul affirms that besides his frequent Apparitions to his Apostles, he was seen at once by above five hundred Brethren; their Testimony in this Matter, if it had been false, was very near as easy and liable to be disproved, as in any of the Matters before spoken of. For it is very hard for so much as two Men that are hired, or agree together to give in a false Evidence, to be so well instructed in the Evidence they are to give, or to concert the Matter so well between themselves, but that upon a separate Examination their Falsity may easily be detected by their Disagreement in some considerable Circumstances of the Matter they bear Witness to; how very much easier then would it have been to have done this, in a Matter cloathed with such great Variety of Circumstances, and which was testified by so many, by twelve, by seventy, by above five hundred Persons.

Or

Or if it can be supposed, that they might have all so fully *agreed* beforehand, in what Manner and with what Circumstances to tell this Story, that it might not be possible to *catch* them in a *Contradiction*; yet the Thing it self was of that Nature, that the false Evidence they had given concerning it, if it had been false, might easily have been shewn *other Ways*; for what they testified was, that *that same Jesus*, whom the *Jews* had crucified, and whom they had seen laid into the Sepulchre, was risen again, and had been seen alive three Days after his Passion by several of his Disciples; had this therefore been false, how very easy would it have been for the *Jews* to have *disproved* their Evidence of it, by only going to the Sepulchre, and taking out thence his *dead Body*, and *exposing* it for some Time to *publick view*? And thither doubtless they did go, and with this Design; but the Body they could not find, and yet they had taken all the Caution that was possible to prevent its being conveyed away, having obtained from *Pilate* a Guard of Soldiers on purpose to keep watch over it for three Days, Matth. xxvii. 62. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of the *Apostles* Testimony concerning our *Lord's Resurrection*; that it being such a Thing as might with the greatest Ease in the World have been disproved if it had been false, the *Jews* had nothing to say against it, nothing to oppose to it, but only that very ill-contriv'd, that self-contradicting Evidence of the Watchmen; who said, that *while they were asleep*, that is, when all their Senses were bound up, and when they were not in a Capacity of knowing any Thing that was done, Matth. xxviii. 13. *the Disciples came and stole the Body away*. But if they *saw* the Body removed, in which Case only they could be good Witnesses of it, they were not, as they said they were, *asleep* when the Thing was done; or if indeed they were *asleep*, when it was removed, they could not be positive how it was removed, they could not say he was *not risen* from the Dead.

6. Another Thing that may be considered, in order to shew how very improbable, or rather how impossible it was, that the *Gospel History* should ever have gained Credit in the World if it had been false, is this; that as it was a History of such Matters, and was so contrived that it might with the greatest Ease have been disproved, so the Matters therein related were in *themselves*, and especially in their *Consequences*, such as must needs have engaged a great many, to make the *strictest Examination* that was possible into the Truth of them, and if they had discovered any Thing of Falshood therein, to make known their *Discovery* to the World.

For the whole *Doctrine* of *Christianity* was grounded upon the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; this disproved would have destroyed *that*, and *this* being admitted, there was no way to put a stop to the spreading of *that*: And the certain *Consequence* of receiving the *Christian Religion* in the World, was the Abolishing of all the other Forms of Religion that were then any where received or established; even of *that* which had been introduced by *Moses* amongst the *Jews*, by the Appointment of God himself, as well as of the several Sorts of *Paganism* and *Idolatry* that were received in other Countries. Now when any *Religion*, be it true or false, is the *established Religion* of a Country, there must needs be a great many engaged by the strongest worldly Interest to support and maintain it. For it was not only at *Ephesus* that a great number of *Crafts-men* got their *Wealth* by making *Silver Shrines* for *Diana*; but in every other Country the *Living* of a considerable Number depended upon the *Religion* that was therein received; which being destroyed, and their Trade or Profession thereby at an End, they must of Necessity be hard put to it to get Bread by taking up some new Employment. And besides, there is nothing that *all Men*, of what Trade or Profession soever they are, are generally

Acts xix. 24.
&c.

generally so zealous and concerned about, nothing that they are so afraid of any Change or Innovation in, as *Religion*. This, be it well or weakly grounded, yet if it be that Form of Religion that they have received from their Fathers, and been bred up in from their Childhood, they will not easily let go.

So that I said too little, when I said before that a great many must needs have been engaged to set themselves to discover the Falsity of the *Evangelical History*; for this was in Truth the common Concern of all Mankind, except only those few Persons who had been instructed by our Saviour, and believed him to be the *Christ*: All others, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, Priests or People, were engaged either by *Interest*, or *Prejudice*, or *Conscience*, or upon some other Account, to convict the *Apostles* of Falshood in their Relation of the Matters contained in the *Evangelical History*; and if any Falshood had been therein, it is impossible, considering how obvious it must needs lie to Discovery, and how many were at Work to find it out, that they could have failed of their Aim; and if any one had made the Discovery, it cannot be imagin'd he would have been long before he had imparted to others a Piece of News so very welcome as that would have been to the generality of Mankind, or that such a Discovery of the Falsity of the *Gospel History* in any one particular, once made and published, should ever after have been stifled or suppressed; because the same Reasons that put them at first upon making the Discovery, were of the same Force afterwards to engage them to preserve the Memory of any Discovery of that Kind that had been made.

And therefore I add, in the last Place; and it is that which gives Weight and Strength, to all that has been said before upon this Subject, and fully completes that Argument which I am now upon for the Proof of the Truth of the *Gospel History*.

7. That notwithstanding the Easiness of the Disproof of this History if it had been false, and the incessant Endeavours of the Adversaries of Christianity to find out some Falshood therein; to do which they were not only prompted by their own Interest and Inclination, but also frequently and boldly challenged by the *Christians* themselves, as may be seen in the ancient *Apologies* for the *Christian Faith*; it is nevertheless a *History* of very good Credit now, cavilled at perhaps, but not denied, not pretended to be disproved, either by *Jews* or *Mahometans*, or any other Sort of *Infidels*; and that it has been of the like good Credit for many hundred Years past, even ever since the first Publication of it; and that it is not so much as contradicted in any Point, by any other *Historian*, that living in or near the Time of its writing, was in a Capacity to contradict it upon good Grounds; viz. upon either certain Knowledge of his own, or very credible Information from others that any Matter therein had been falsely related.

True, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, there is indeed no History of competent Antiquity now extant, by which the *Gospel History* can be disproved; but that there has been no such History cannot with Certainty be affirmed. This therefore, say they, is our Unhappiness, that though we have a good Cause, we are destitute of Means to support it; and are in the Condition that the *Israelites* are said to have been in, in the Days of *Saul*, when they had War with the *Philistines*: It came to pass in the Day of Battel there was neither Sword nor Spear found in the Hand of any of the People. But what was the Reason of this? Why, the *Philistines* had disarmed them; they had taken away the Weapons they had before, and would not permit more to be made. And this, say the *Infidels*, is exactly our Case:

1 Sam. xiii. 22.

Ver. 19.

*

In

In the War we have now with the *Christians* we are forced to fight without Sword or Spear; and tho' for other good Reasons we are confident the *Gospel History* is false, and are resolved never to believe it, and make no Doubt but that in former Times it has been opposed and contradicted; yet in this the *Christians* have been too hard and too cunning for us; that while they have kept their own Weapons, they have sily taken away ours; for they have been careful to preserve the ancient Books that were written by those of their own Party in Defence of their *Superstition*, but the Books of their *Adversaries* they have been as careful to suppress and destroy; and they have had such good Success in it, that of all the Books or Discourses of the ancient *Champions* of *Judaism*, *Paganism*, or *Deism*, *Trypho*, *Celsus*, *Porphyry*, *Julian*, and other great Names, not much is now remaining besides *Fragments*, and those perhaps imperfectly or falsely cited, to be picked up out of the Books of those who have written Answers to them, who, we may well presume, took notice only of those Passages therein which they thought were easiest to be answered. But this is no unusual Thing, for the powerful and prevailing Party to stifle that *Evidence* which they know not how to disprove, and to suppress those Books which they cannot answer. And this, say they, we take for a good Argument that there was something very considerable in these Books, and not easily to be answered; because otherwise the *Christians* of former Times would have been more willing that they should be preserved and transmitted to after-Times, that so Posterity upon a fair Hearing of all that had been said on both Sides, might be able to pass a right Judgment upon the Case, and either to chuse or to reject the Profession of *Christianity*, with Prudence and Discretion.

This is what has been sometimes suggested by the Enemies of our Religion; and indeed I know not what else can well be said, to invalidate that Proof of the *Gospel History* which I am now upon. But what slender Ground there is for this Suggestion, and how very little the Christian Cause is affected by it, a few Words will suffice to shew.

For first, whereas it is said, that tho' indeed there are no Histories now in being whereby the *Gospel History* can be disproved, it is possible however there may have formerly been several *Narratives* extant that were perfectly contradictory to it, and those too perhaps better attested and confirmed than the *Gospel History* was; to this I answer; that it is never allowed to be a good Proof that a Thing is, to say that it is possible it might be. And besides, if this Surmise or Suggestion of a Thing barely possible be a good Objection against the *Gospel History*, it is as much an Objection against all other ancient Histories; if for this Reason the *Gospel History* be not credible, no other History is so; for there is no ancient History in the World now extant, which we can be sure was never contradicted by some other as ancient History, that is not extant.

But secondly, as there is no Evidence that the *Gospel History* was contradicted when it was first published, that is, when, if it had been false, it might most easily have been disproved; so there is on the other Side, as good Evidence as such a Matter is capable of, that it never was thus contradicted or disproved; because if the Facts recorded by the *Evangelical History* had been then denied or disproved by any competent and credible Witnesses, it is impossible that the *Christian Doctrine*, which was grounded upon and chiefly established by these Facts, should ever have spread so fast as by the Confession of all Parties it did, from the Time that it began to be preached by the *Apostles*. Nothing but the strong Evidence that there was of the Truth of the *Gospel History*; and strong it cannot be accounted, if there was stronger and better Evidence on the other Side; could have supported the Profession of *Christianity*, when it had nothing

to recommend it self by but its Purity and Truth, against that violent Opposition which it met with every where in the World. And,

3. Whereas it is farther suggested, that the Loss of those ancient Books which are supposed to have been written to disprove the *Gospel History*, is owing to the Power and Subtilty of the *Christians* of those early Times, who thought it best to *stifle* that *Evidence* which they could not gainsay or refute; this Suggestion is manifestly as groundless as it is malicious.

For many Books of all Sorts and of all Sides have perished by *Accident*, or been worn out by Time, without any formal Design of any Party or Persons to suppress and destroy them; and I see no Reason why these Books written in *contradiction* to the *Gospel History*, if indeed any such were ever written, may not have perished one of these Ways, as well as many other Books have done.

Or if a Reason must needs be given why some Books, and why *these* in particular, have been lost, while others of the same or greater Antiquity have been preserved; I think the *little Value* that Men generally had for those Books that are lost, is the best Reason that can be given why they were suffered to perish; and that the most probable Cause of Men's having so little Value for them was, because the *Matter* of them was so evidently *false*, or the *Reasoning* of them so manifestly *weak* and *fallacious*, that no Man thought it worth his while to be at the Pains or Charge of getting them transcribed.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with will not allow this to be a good Account of the Loss of such very *valuable Books*, as they think these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were, let them find out a better: But I am sure that *that* before suggested by them, *viz.* that it was by *Design*; the first *Christians* purposely *abolishing* and *destroying* all *Testimonies* and *Records* that made against them; is a much worse Account of it, and infinitely more improbable than that which I have given.

For it must be supposed either that these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were written very *early*, as soon almost as the *Gospel History* was published by the preaching or writing of the *Apostles*, or else in *after-Times*; and if they were *destroyed* by the *Christians*, this must have been done, either *soon after* they were written, or else after they had been for *some Time* received and allowed as true Histories by the Adversaries of the *Christian Faith*.

Now if it be supposed that *these Books* were not written till a *good while after* the *Apostles* had preached, and the *Evangelists* written the *Gospel*, they were written *too late* to be of sufficient Authority to weaken the Credit of the *Gospel History*: For how could those that were not *born* when the Things recorded in the *Gospel* were said to be done, pretend to contradict the Testimony of those who were *living* at that Time, and who testified either that they saw them with their *own Eyes*, or that they received that Account of them which they published, from very *credible Persons*, who said they had been *Eye witnesses* thereof?

But if it be supposed that *these Books* were written *sooner*, even as soon almost as the *Evangelists* wrote, or the *Apostles* began to publish, by their preaching, the *Gospel History*; then I say it is impossible, they should be *suppressed* and *destroyed* by the *Christians*, either *then*, or *afterwards*.

Not *then*; for though we grant that Christianity from the very first preaching of it, made a very swift Progress in the World, and from a Beginning no bigger than a Grain of Mustard-seed, grew up quickly to be a goodly Tree, shadowing many Nations under the Branches of it; yet it did not spring up like a *Mushroom* in a *Night*; it did not *grow* to this *Bigness* all *at once*. And what were the *Christians* in the weak and infant State of the

the Church; but an Handful of Men in Comparison with their numberless Opposers, and those too without *Wealth*, without *Power*, of no *Interest* or *Esteem* in the World; that they should undertake to *corrupt* or *stifle* the *Evidence* that was given against them, which was *supported* by the *secular Power*, and gladly received and *embraced* by all *other Men* but themselves? What were they, that they should be able to *call in* all the *Books* that had been written against them, and to *suppress* and *destroy* them at their *Pleasure*? and that too so *fully* and *effectually*, as that with the *Books* themselves which they destroyed, all *Memory* of them should likewise *perish*? A powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its Side, may indeed do much in this Kind, and yet hardly so much as this; but they that believe the *Christians* to have been such a *powerful* and *prevailing Party*, *early enough* to hinder the spreading and dispersing of any *Books* that were written against them, believe, without any Ground or Warrant from History, a more unaccountable and incredible Thing than any that is recorded in the *Gospel*.

But if this could not be done then, it might perhaps be done *afterwards*; for in progress of Time it is certain, it may be said, that the *Christians* did come to be of very great *Power* and *Interest*, and able to *bear down* all their *Opposers*; and it is likely enough that *then* they might set themselves to *destroy* all those Monuments of Antiquity, whereby their *fabulous Gospels* had been contradicted and disproved; and it is not incredible that they should so far succeed in their Attempt as to leave no Means to Posterity to discern how weak and sandy a Foundation their Religion was built upon.

But this Supposition, taking it all together, involves a greater Difficulty, and supposes a greater Miracle than the former did. For whatever the *Christians* might attempt to do, or whatever they might be able to do after they had attained to such great Power, and were become the most numerous and prevailing Party; it is utterly incredible that they ever could have *attained* to such great Power, that they ever could have become the most *numerous* and *prevailing Party*, if indeed the *Gospel History* had, almost from the very Beginning, been opposed and contradicted by other Histories that were more credible than the *Gospel History* was.

For it must be, and is granted by all, that at the first preaching of Christianity all worldly Power and Interest were on the other Side, and engaged most strongly to hinder the Growth and Spreading of it. Now when *Truth* is on one Side, and *Power* and *Interest* on the other, it is not impossible that *Truth* may at last prevail against *Interest*, and bring the *Power* also to be on its Side: But if *Truth*, I mean that which hath most Appearance of *Truth*; I say if *Truth*, and *Power*, and *Interest* are all on the same Side from the Beginning; as it must be allowed, they were, by those who say, that the *Gospel History* was quickly prov'd false by other Histories written and published about the same Time; then I say it is utterly impossible, that an *Imposture* quickly discover'd to be an *Imposture*, and which serv'd no worldly Interest, should ever have so gained Ground as *Christianity* did, against that apparent *Truth* and mighty *Power* and *Interest* that were on the other Side. So that whatever Progress *Christianity* might have made for a short Time at first, by reason of the Boldness and Confidence of its first Preachers, it must needs be that immediately from and after the Time that the *Anti-Gospel Histories*, of better Credit and Authority than the *Gospel History* was, were published, it must have declined much faster than it had before increased, and in a very few Years have so dwindled to nothing, that it is like in the Age in which we live there, would hardly have been so much as any Remembrance of it left.

And now, if nothing more could be said upon this Subject; for I have not Time at present to take into Consideration the *other Proofs* before hinted at

of

of the *Truth* of the *Gospel History*; I think what has been said already is enough to shew, that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to the *Evangelical Writers*, in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded: This I am sure of, that upon much less Evidence and Assurance of Truth than we have in this, we generally give Credit to other Histories.

For we believe other *Historians* in their Relation of such Matters, as they could not have so *certain Knowledge* or so *good Assurance* of, as the *Evangelical Writers* might have of those plain *Matters of Fact* and *Sense* which they have related in *their History*.

And again, we believe other *Historians* giving an Account of Things which they do not pretend to have had a *personal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far *distant* from them, and in *Times* long before them; which their *Readers* had no *Means* to enquire into the Truth of; which were done in *secret*, or when but *few* were by; and which if they were falsely related, none were *engaged* by any worldly Interest to be at much *Pains* to *disprove*.

And lastly, if *two Historians* of the same Antiquity give different or contradictory Accounts of the same Matter, we do not for that Reason alone presently *reject* either of them; but we enquire which of them was in the *best Capacity* to know the Truth, and which of them is the least *liable* to the *Suspicion* of *Falshood*, and which Story is the most *probably related*, and to the Belief of *that* we incline.

If therefore there be any Man that thinks there is any Truth in History, and who does give Credit to other Histories (and I believe there is no Man but does so) and yet will not be persuaded to allow that the *Gospel History* is very *credible*, which contains a Relation only of such *Matters of Sense* as it was morally impossible there should be any *Cheat* or *Deceit* in; and in which if there had been any Deceit or Mistake, it was morally impossible that it should not be *discovered* and *disproved*; and which yet, neither is now, nor ever was *contradicted* by any *History* of competent *Antiquity* and good *Credit*; I think we may very well conclude, that it is not *Reason* or *Judgment*, but *Prejudice*, or *Interest*, or the *Love* of some *Vice* or *Lust*, that makes him an *Infidel*.



DISCOURSE XCII.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-Revelation ;

As to the *Proof* of it. PART II.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



THE Subject I was upon in my last Discourse on these Words, and which I left unfinish'd, was to shew, that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to the *Authors* of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded.

For the *Proof* of which I propos'd these following Things to be consider'd ;

I. The *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* they have recorded, and of the *History* it self.

II. The good *Capacity* they were in to *know* the *Truth* of the Things they have related.

III The strong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their *Knowledge* or *Information*.

IV. The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And,

V. Lastly, the *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their *History* by God *himself*.

The last Discourse was spent in the Consideration of the first of these Things; I proceed now to the second, *viz.*

II. The good *Capacity* that the *Writers* of the *Evangelical History* were in to *know* the Truth of those Things which they have related.

Now the Matters of *History* which are related in the *Epistles* are but few, and those, for the most Part, such as had been done by, or had happened to, either the Persons that wrote them, or the Churches or Persons to whom they were written; so that of these we shall not need to say any Thing.

For the Bulk or Body of the *Evangelical History* is contain'd in the *four Gospels*, and in the *Acts of the Apostles*; and of the *Authors* of these Books there is no Controversy in the *Christian Church*; and if they were written by the *reputed Authors*, a few Words will suffice to shew, that *they* were in a very good *Capacity* to *know* the Truth of the Things they have recorded, much better than most other antient Historians, whose Relations, nevertheless, are generally thought worthy of Credit.

For St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, two of the four *Evangelists*, were of the Number of those *Twelve* who were in constant Attendance upon our *Lord*, from the Time that he first began to preach and to make Disciples, until he was taken up into Heaven; so that they were themselves *Eye* and *Ear-Witnesses* of most of the Things which they have recorded.

Matt. xvii. 4.
— xxvi. 37.
Mark v. 37.

Of St. *Mark* and St. *Luke* indeed the same cannot be said; neither is it certain that they were of the Number of the seventy Disciples, tho' that be affirmed by some of the Antients: But this I think is agreed to by all; that St. *Mark* was for some Part of his Life a constant Companion of St. *Peter*, who was not only one of the *Twelve*, but, most probably, the *first* that was call'd to be an *Apostle*, and who was also one of the *Three* with whom our *Lord* was most intimate and familiar; for we often read, that *Peter*, and *James* and *John* were singled from the rest to be Witnesses of some of the most private Transactions of his Life: And it was generally believed in the antient Church, that St. *Peter* was more truly the Author of the *Gospel* called St. *Mark's*, than St. *Mark* himself; he being only the *Scribe* or *Amanuensis*, and St. *Peter* the Person that *dictated* the Things written by him; whence also this *Gospel* is by some of the Antients stiled *the Gospel of St. Peter*. And of this there seem to be some Tokens even in the History it self; particularly in that Relation that is therein given of St. *Peter's Denial* of his Master, and of his *Repentance* for it; for his *Denial* is there told with some *more* Circumstances than in the other Gospels, such as the Person himself chiefly concerned was best able to know and might best remember; and the Account that is given of his *Repentance*, is by this Author expressed more modestly, as it best became a Person to speak who spake of himself, than it is by the other *Evangelists*; for St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke* say that he wept *bitterly*; but St. *Mark*, or rather St. *Peter* himself dictating those Words, only says, that *when he thought thereon he wept*.

It is likewise agreed on all Hands that St. *Luke*, if not one of the seventy Disciples, which it is most probable he was not, was however a very early Convert to Christianity; that he conversed frequently with the *Apostles* and immediate *Disciples* of our *Lord*, and was a constant Companion of St. *Paul*, for a good while, in his Preaching and Travels; so that of almost all the Things which he relates in his *History* of the *Acts of the Apostles* he might be, and of much the greatest Part of them, it is most probable, and of some, it is certain, he was an *Eye* or *Ear-Witness*.

So then, there are *three* of the *five* Historical Books of the *New Testament* that were written by those who were present at most of the Things which they have related, *viz.* the *Gospels* of St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, and the

the *Acts of the Apostles*; and another of them, tho' it bears the Name of St. Mark, the Person by whom it was penned, yet if it was, as has been generally believ'd, dictated by St. Peter, may be added to that Number, and be likewise reckon'd the Testimony of one who was an *Eye-Witness* of the Things he has related.

In this Respect therefore the *Gospel History* is manifestly as credible as it is possible any History should be; for no Historian can record any Thing upon better Assurance of the Truth than the Evidence of his own Senses.

But the *Gospel* of St. Luke, it must be granted, is not of this Sort; He himself does not pretend, that the Matters by him recorded were of his own Knowledge; he only says, *He had perfect understanding of them from the very first, from those who from the Beginning were Eye-Witnesses and Ministers of the Word.* Luke i. 2, 34 And of some few Matters recorded by the other *Evangelists*, the same must likewise be granted, particularly of the Things that were done before they were called to be *Apostles*; of these Things I say, it must be granted, that it is most probable, they were not Matters of their own Knowledge, but that they recorded them only upon credible Information from others. But when it is consider'd on the other Hand, that there are very few Things related by St. Luke which are not to be found in some of the other Gospels, his Testimony that he had perfect Information of the Things he has recorded from several Eye-witnesses, adds a Degree of Credibility even to the other Gospels, and is a good corroborating Evidence of their Truth: And all the Matters recorded by him, or the other *Evangelists*, only upon the Information of others, must be granted to be more credible than the Matter of most other antient Histories of good Credit is; if we reflect upon what was said in the former Discourse concerning the *Nature and Circumstances* of the Things recorded; particularly, that they were such Things as might be most *certainly known*, and were capable of the *best Attestation*; and that they were Things done in the *same Age*, and in the *same Country*, in which they lived who have written the History thereof.

And what hath been said is, I hope, *sufficient*, to shew the good *Capacity* the *Authors* of the *Historical* Parts of the *New Testament* were in, to *know* the Truth of the Things they have recorded; most of them being such as it is probable *Three* of the *Evangelists*, as *Two* of them, without all Dispute, were *Eye-Witnesses* of, and the rest such as they might have certain *Information* of from several Persons then alive, and well able to witness the same.

Of the *Ability* then of these Authors to write a true History of these Matters, I think, there can be no reasonable Doubt: And that there is as little Reason to doubt of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*, will in Part appear, if we consider in the third Place,

III. The strong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information.

Now the *Obligations* that Men are under to speak or write Truth may be reduc'd to two Heads, *Honour* and *Conscience*: By both which the *Evangelical Writers* were more strongly obliged to Truth in their Relations, than commonly other Historians are.

I. One *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but what is true, is *Honour*. For there is nothing that is generally accounted more base or dishonourable than to tell a Lie; there is nothing that by those who stand most upon their Honour is thought more reflecting and disparaging, and more necessary to be resent'd as an high Affront, than to have the Lie given them. What therefore is generally thought to be a great Reproach, it may reasonably be

be presumed, unless the contrary appears, a Man will be careful to avoid, by not giving any just Occasion to have it cast upon him.

And this is one Ground of that great Credit that is generally given to ancient Histories; it is presum'd, unless there be evident Cause to think otherwise, that the Authors of them were Men of so much *Honour*, and that they had such a Sense of the Reproach and Discredit that it would be to them, to be found out in a Lie, as made them careful not to record any Thing as a certain Truth, but what they had good Knowledge or Information of.

But that this *Obligation* to Truth was stronger on the *Authors* of the *Evangelical History*, than on most other Historians, is abundantly evident from what was noted the last Time, concerning the *Nature* and *Conditions* of the Things by them related, and of their *History* of them.

For the Matter of most other ancient Histories is such, that the Historians might report many Things untruly or upon slight Information, and yet be pretty well assur'd that they should not be reputed Liars; because the Matters recorded by them being Things either done in some *Places* a good way off, or in some *Time* long before, or in the Presence of but *few* Persons, they might know that none of those, into whose Hands their Histories would fall, would be in a Capacity to contradict them tho' they were false: Or they might reasonably suppose that their Readers would rather acquiesce in their Report, than travel so far or take so much Pains as they must have done to disprove it; especially if it was a Matter of no great Consequence to their Readers whether their Report was true or false.

But in the *Gospel History* the Case was quite otherwise, and the Historians themselves could not but know that it was so. For there were a great many concern'd to find out some Falsity in it, and there were a great many that would have taken any Pains to have done it; and yet the Matters related by the *Evangelists*, and their Manner of relating them were such, that their History, if it had been false in any Particular, might have been disproved with the greatest Ease, with being at any Pains to do it; because most of those into whose Hands it first came, would either have known it to be false, or would readily have been told that it was so, by Abundance of Persons that could of their own Knowledge have contradicted it. So that if it be supposed that the *Evangelists* had any Regard at all to their own *Reputation*, it can't be imagin'd either that they did record any Thing contrary to their Knowledge, or that in Matters that were not of their own Knowledge they neglected to get the best Information and Intelligence that could be had; because if they had done either of these, they could not have been so vain, as to hope to escape being censured as the most notorious and shameless Liars that ever wrote. But,

2. The strongest *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but the Truth, is *Conscience*: And the Sense that all Men are supposed to have of the natural Turpitude of a Lie, is the chief Ground of that very great Credit that we give to human Testimony, in Cases of the greatest Concern and Consequence.

But this *Obligation* to Truth was likewise stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History* than on most other Historians; it was indeed so very strong, that nothing less than an evident Proof of their Falsity can justify the entertaining so much as a Suspicion of it.

For to speak and write the Truth was what they were obliged to, not only by the Law of Nature, to which all Men are alike subject, but also by the Rules of that Religion which they had been bred up in; by which they had been expressly forbidden to *lie one to another*, and by which they had been taught that a *false Witness that speaketh Lies is an Abomination to the Lord*, and especially by the strict Command of him whom they had lately taken for their

Lev. xix. 11.
Pro. vi. 16, 19.

their Master, and whose Laws and Religion they were to preach and propagate in the World, by which they were obliged, and under the severest Penalty, no less than eternal Damnation, *to put away all Lying, and to speak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour.* Eph. iv. 25. Rev. xxi. 8.

The *Subject Matter* of their Relation did also lay upon them the strongest *Obligation* to have a strict Regard to Truth in every Thing that they wrote. For if it be a Sin to speak an Untruth in any *common* Matter, it is manifestly a greater Sin to do it in *grave* and *serious* Things, when Truth is most expected; and especially in *Matters of Religion*, wherein a Lie is most unbecoming: And if it be a Sin to utter a Slander, or to tell a Lie of a *Man*, it is evidently a Sin of a more heinous Nature, to report an Untruth concerning *God*, and to utter a Falshood in the *Name of God*; and if to lead Men into *any Mistake* by a false Relation be a Practice not to be justified, altho' the Mistake they are led into be of no hurtful Consequence either to themselves or to the World; it is evidently a great Aggravation of the Lie, if Men are thereby deceived in a Case of the *nearest* and *dearest* Concern to them, if they are led thereby into an Error that may prove *fatal* to them to all Eternity. And lastly, if it be a very great Sin, only *once* to speak an Untruth that may be prejudicial to *one* Man; it is plainly the greatest and the most unpardonable Sin of this Kind to *record* an Untruth, with a Design thereby to deceive, to their everlasting Destruction, *all the Men* that shall ever be born into the World in all future Ages.

If therefore the *Gospel History* be false, there was manifestly such a *Complication* of most horrid *Wickedness* in the Publishers and Compilers of it, as it is not fair to suppose even *one* single Man would be guilty of; and much less can it be reasonably supposed that *several* Men, *viz.* not only the *four Evangelists*, but *all* the other *Apostles* who preached the same Things that they wrote, did consent to the reporting of *so many*, and such *notorious* and *hurtful* Untruths.

But this, it may be it will be said, is not a direct Proof, that the *Evangelists* were true and faithful in their Relations, but only a *probable Ground* of presuming that they were so: And I grant it is no more. But nevertheless, I think, if nothing more could be offered, this alone would be sufficient to render their Testimony highly credible, so long as nothing is alleged on the other Side to disprove it; and in all other Cases we allow it to be so. For by the Testimony of Persons of whose Truth we have no other Assurance but such a *probable Presumption*, all Questions and Controversies of the greatest Concern, relating to the Lives and Estates of Men, are in this World finally decided; every Man that bears Witness in any such Case being, by the common Judgment of Mankind, taken and accepted as a good Witness, unless the contrary appears; and by the Testimony of *two* or *three* such Witnesses we all consent that *every Matter* should be *established*.

But then I add farther, that besides this *reasonable Presumption* of the Truth of the *Witnesses* of the *Gospel History*, which is all that we ordinarily have, or do desire in other Cases; there is as good *positive Proof* of their Truth as can be required. And this was the next Thing propos'd to be consider'd, *viz.*

4. The good *Evidences* that we have of their Honesty and Faithfulness.

And here it may be noted; for tho' it be a Thing that we lay no great Stress upon in this Case, yet I think it is not to be omitted, because it is one of the best Evidences that we can have of the Faithfulness of any Historian whose personal Character is unknown to us; that the Authors of the *Evangelical History* seem to have related all Matters with the greatest *Impartiality*; that they seem as *free* in telling the Things that were, or might be accounted *disgraceful* to their Master or themselves, as in telling those Things that were

most *glorious* and *reputable*. For thus, in their History of the Life of *Christ*, as they tell us the Wonderfulness of his Birth, the many Miracles that he wrought, the Testimony that was given him by the Descent of the *Holy Ghost* upon him, and by the Voice of *God*, his glorious Resurrection from the Dead, and Ascension into Heaven; so they stick not to tell us also the *Mean-ness* of his Parentage, the *Obscurity* of his Birth, his *poor* and *low* Condition in the World, the *Affronts* that were given him, the *Contempt* he was had in, and the shameful *Death* he was put to. And of themselves, they have left it upon Record to all Posterity, that they were of the *meanest* Extraction, and bred up to very *poor* or *scandalous* Employments, that they were *Fisher-Men*, *Tent-Makers*, *Publicans*; they own that they were *ignorant* and *unlearned* Men; they tell their own *childish* Mistakes about the Nature of the Kingdom of the *Messiah*; they mention their own *foolish* and *ambitious* Contentions with one another about worldly Greatness; they confess their own *Baseness* and *Cowardice* in forsaking their Master when in Danger, after the most solemn Professions of Friendship, and repeated Assurances of Stedfastness and Fidelity. St. *Peter's* Denial of *Christ* is a Thing noted by all the *Evangelists*, and by St. *Peter* himself, if the Gospel of St. *Mark* be accounted *his*, is told with its *worst* Circumstances; and St. *Paul* freely owns, that before his Conversion to Christianity he was a *Blasphemer*, a *Persecutor*, and *injurious*, and the *chief of Sinners*. Now their recording such Things as these concerning their Master and themselves, as it is an Evidence of their *Impartiality*, is consequently a good Argument of the Truth of their History; for had they allowed themselves a Liberty of varying from the Truth in any Particular, it cannot be imagin'd but that they would at least have concealed their own Frailties and Infirmities; it cannot be suppos'd they would have furnished their Adversaries with Matter wherewith to reproach them.

But it is possible that an Historian who means to deceive his Readers in some Matter of greater Moment, may purposely insert some few such Passages as these, thereby to gain to himself an easier Belief in other Things, and to cover his wicked Design. It is therefore *another* and a *better* Evidence of the Truth of the *Gospel History*, that the *Evangelists* and other Witnesses of the Facts recorded in the Gospels, were Persons not liable to any just Suspicion of Unfaithfulness in their Relations; because whatever they had been before, they were then in all other Respects Persons of a very good Character. *1 Theff. ii. 10.* *are Witnesses, says the Apostle, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we have behaved our selves among you.* They that could not be charged with any *other Crimes*, were not justly to be suspected guilty of *Forgery* and *Lying*. And we have abundant Reason to believe that they were in all other Respects unblameable, because there is no Evidence that they were ever charged at all, either truly or falsely, even by their greatest Enemies, with any other Fault but only too great Zeal and Industry in propagating their Religion. And it is no Wonder that this should be thought a Fault by those who were of another Religion; or that by the Powers that then were, who endeavoured with all their Might to suppress the Growth of Christianity, the *Apostles*, who were so zealous to spread it, should be looked upon as *disaffected* to their *Government* and *Movers of Sedition*. But however, this, if it had been a Fault, was not such a Crime as could justly have rendred their Honesty suspected; but on the contrary, it was rather a very good Argument, that however they might possibly be mistaken, yet they did believe themselves; it is a fair Proof, that they thought they had good Evidence of the Things they testified, and that they reckoned themselves under a strict Obligation to testify the same.

For it is plain, and that is *another good Argument* of their Veracity, that they could have no *worldly End* or *Design* either in the framing or publishing of those Stories which they related; so that if they were *Fables* which they told, they were far from being *cunningly devised Fables*; because, as the World then was, they could not have been so vain as to hope to raise themselves either to *Honour* or *Wealth* by preaching a *crucified Messiah*, to the Jews a *Stumbling Block*, and to the Greeks *Foolishness*. Now it is not to be supposed that any Man will frame or report a Lye for *nothing*: Whoever knowingly deceives another, must be supposed to intend some Advantage to himself thereby; and therefore if there be no Untruth appearing in the Relation, and no Gain or other Advantage that the Reporter can be supposed to make to himself by it, it may very reasonably be presumed that the Report is true. But so far was this, if it was a Lye, from being a profitable and advantageous Lye to the Forgers and Reporters of it, that on the contrary it was, and they could not but readily foresee that it would be, very *prejudicial* to their worldly Interests, exposing them to all Sorts of Persecutions from all Sorts of Men; for both Jews and Gentiles, and every Sect and Party of every other Religion, however hating one another with a mortal Hatred, readily joined together to persecute the Christians, and those above all others who were the *Witnesses* of Christianity, the *Ring-leaders*, as they called them, of the *Sect of the Nazarenes*.

This therefore may be reckoned *another Evidence* of their Truth; and as it is a stronger Evidence of Truth than any that has been yet mentioned, so it is such an one as I believe no History in the World has, but that of the Gospel, *viz.* that no *Threats* or *Punishments* could move the Witnesses of those Things that are recorded in the *Evangelical History*, so much as to *desist* from giving fresh Testimony to the Truth of the Things which they had once related. For this seems to have been all that was ever required or expected from them; not that they should retract the Testimony they had given, but only that they should *not speak or teach any more in the Name of Jesus*: And upon this Condition alone any of them might have expected both a Pardon for what he had done before, and likewise all fitting Favour and Encouragement. But this was what they all refused to do, giving no other Reason of their Refusal but this, that they were very sure of the Truth of the Things they had spoken, and that there was a *Necessity* laid upon them to preach the Gospel. *Whether, say they, it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the Things which we have seen and heard.* And the more they were threatned to hold their Peace, so much the more boldly did they speak, not only *filling Jerusalem with their Doctrine*, but likewise spreading the same in all the World; and tho' they knew that in every City where they came, *Bonds and Afflictions did abide them; none of these Things moved them, neither did they count their Lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their Course with Joy, and the Ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.*

And if these Proofs and Evidences already mentioned of the Truth and Faithfulness of the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* are not thought sufficient to gain them Credit, what is there that would be *sufficient*? for more Evidence, or better Proof cannot reasonably be desired; so good is very rarely to be met with, or expected; and indeed I think there is but only one stronger Proof thereof that can ever possibly be given by *Men*; and that is when a *Witness* lays down his *Life* to confirm the Testimony he has given: For if when a Man has witnessed any Thing, and is questioned for it, and threatned with *Death* if he persists in it, he still continues boldly to testify the

same Thing; and especially if when upon the *Rack* or on the *Cross*, in the midst of the *sharpest Torments*, and even at the Hour of his *Death*, he justifies the Truth of his former Testimony, he certainly gives the best Assurance that it is possible for any Man to give, of his *Honesty* and *Truth*; and if any human Testimony be credible, this is certainly so in the highest Degree.

That therefore our Belief of the Gospel might be built upon the surest Grounds, it pleased the divine Wisdom so to order it, that all those who were the first Witnesses thereof to the World should give likewise this best possible Proof of their Veracity. For of all the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, of the Manner of whose Death there is any Memory preserved either by History or Tradition, St. *John* is the only Person that did not seal the Testimony he had given with his Blood; and that he did not suffer *Martyrdom* as well as the rest, was not occasioned by his *forbearing* to repeat the Testimony he had before given, and much less by his *retracting* it, but was merely an Act of divine and *miraculous Providence*, whereby tho' he was put into a *Caldron of boiling Oyl*, his Life was preserved; so that in Truth, considering the Hazard he ran of his Life, which could not have been saved but by a Miracle, he may very well be counted a *Martyr* for the Testimony of *Jesus*, no less than the other *Apostles*, altho' he did not actually expire under his Sufferings as they did.

Job. ii. 4.

Now if it be supposed, that a Man, especially one who stands much upon his Credit, may be willing, after he has told a Lye, to suffer a great Deal rather than own himself a Lyar; tho' I think it cannot reasonably be supposed, either that any Man would suffer so many other great Evils as the *Apostles* did, only upon a Point of *Honour*, or that the *Apostles* did stand so much upon their *Honour*; yet when it is brought to this, that a Man who has told a Lye must either *retract* it, or *dye* for it, and that he may in all Probability save his Life by retracting it, it is not to be supposed that any Man will be a *Martyr* for a *known Falshood*. For it is a very true Saying, and to which there is hardly any Exception, tho' it was spoken by the Father of Lyes, that *Skin for Skin, yea all that a Man hath he will give for his Life*. It is not credible therefore, that so much as one Man should be found so foolish as to sacrifice his Life to a known Lye, and that too an *unprofitable* Lye, to himself, to his Family, and to all the World; and this only to save his *Reputation*: It is much less credible that so many Men, viz. all the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, and most if not all the rest of our Lord's immediate *Disciples* should be guilty of such prodigious and unheard of Folly; and it is least of all credible, that among so many as there were that bore Witness of the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History*, not so much as one Man should be found that was *honest* and *wiser* than the rest; not one that could be persuaded to give *Glory* to God by the *Confession* of his Fault, and *Satisfaction* to the World, by a publick owning of the Cheat he had been engaged in; not one that would chuse to undergo the Disgrace of a Lyar rather than the shameful Death of a Malefactor.

These are in short the *Evidences* we have of the *Honesty* and *Faithfulness* of the *Evangelical Historians*; those Evidences I mean which they themselves have given thereof; and they are plainly as good as could be desired, they are the best that could be given by Men.

And putting together all that hath been said on this and the foregoing Heads, now, and in my last Discourse, for the Proof of the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; I think we may truly and confidently affirm, that although we consider it only as a mere *human History*, we have much greater Reason to give Credit to it, than to any History in the World besides.

But if we receive the *Witness of Men*, (and who is there that does not?) ^{1 John v. 9.} the *Witness of God* is greater; and therefore in order to shew farther that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the *Evangelical Historians* in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded; I proposed to be considered, in the fifth and last Place,

V. The Confirmation that was given to the Truth of their History, by God himself. For what St. Paul says of his own, was likewise true of the Speech and preaching of all the other Apostles; viz. that it was in Demon-^{1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.}stration of the Spirit and of Power; that the Faith of their Hearers should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God. And so St. Luke says, *Acts* iv. 33. With great Power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. For at the same Time that they witnessed the Miracles of their Master, they gave Assurance to Men of the Truth of their Testimony by doing the like Miracles themselves, healing the sick, casting out Devils, raising the dead, &c. just as Jesus himself had done. And at the same Time that, pursuant to their Commission, they preached the Gospel to Men of all Nations and Languages, they plainly demonstrated, both that they had such a Commission from God, and that it was the Truth of God which they preached, by speaking to every Man of every Nation in his own Tongue.

Thus, as the Author to the Hebrews says, God did bear them Witness^{Heb. ii. 4.} both with Signs and Wonders, and with diverse Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will. And he might well say, that God did hereby bear them Witness, because that Power wherewith they were endued was so evidently from on high, that none that saw their Works,^{Luke xxiv. 49.} and considered withal the Purity and Excellence of the Doctrine of Christianity that was thereby established, could have any reasonable Doubt whether they were done by the Power of God or no. We know, said Nicodemus^{John iii. 2.} to our Saviour, that thou art a Teacher sent from God, for no Man can do the Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. But the same Works^{John xiv. 12.} that Jesus did, did his Disciples also, after he had sent down the Promise of his Father upon them, on the Day of Pentecost; yea, and greater Works than those did they do; so that whoever beheld their Works, might, so far as Miracles are Evidences of a divine Power, be rather more certain that God was with them, than Nicodemus could be, that he was with our Lord himself. For tho' their other Miracles, that were of the same Sort with those which our Saviour had done, were such Proofs of divine Assistance as could not with any Reason be gainsaid; yet, I think it may be truly affirm'd, that the Gift of Tongues, which was peculiar to them, and wherein they did, as we may say, excel even our Lord himself, was more convincing than any of them: For he that saw one of their other Miracles might possibly entertain some little Doubt whether the Effect that appeared to him to be miraculous might not yet be done by some secret Power of natural Causes that was unknown to him: But we all know the Power of Nature so well, that we are sure, the Knowledge of a Language cannot possibly be attained naturally, even by a Person of the quickest Parts and faithfullest Memory, but in so much Time, at the least, as it will necessarily take up to be told by Tutors, or to learn from Lexicons, what every particular Word of the Language to be learnt, is by the People of that Language designed to signify; because Words have not a natural Relation to the Notions or Things thereby expressed, but are mere arbitrary Signs thereof. So that whoever knew the Education of the Apostles, and that they were before altogether ignorant and unlearned, and yet saw them every one, on a sudden, on the Day of Pentecost, able to speak readily in all the Languages

Acts ii. 4.

of all the Nations under Heaven, from whence had come some of the *Jews* that were present at *Jerusalem* at that Time, could have no possible Doubt of their supernatural Assistance. They that heard them speak with *Tongues*, which they had never learned, could not but conclude that it was the *Spirit* that gave them this Utterance, because nothing else could give it; so that this was not only, as their other Miracles were, a *Proof* of *Inspiration*, but likewise an *Instance* and *Example* of it; it was a *Proof* of an inward and invisible Inspiration, by an *Inspiration* that was, as I may say, outward and visible; by an *Inspiration*, that was discernible even by the bodily Senses of all those that were present.

But be it so, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, that they that saw the *Miracles* which the *Apostles* are reported to have done in the Name of *Christ*, had Reason enough to believe their Testimony concerning him, and as well that which they have left in Writing, as that which they gave by Word of Mouth: Yet what is this to us that live now? For we neither saw the *Miracles* that they wrought, nor heard them speaking with *Tongues*, neither have we any Assurance that they ever did either the one or the other, but only from themselves. They indeed tell us that they did a great many wonderful Things, such as we are willing enough to grant could not be done but by the Power of God, in Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*; but we see no more Reason to believe this their Testimony concerning themselves, than there is to believe their other Testimony concerning him; so that this cannot in Reason be reckoned a *Proof* or Confirmation of that; nay rather, we think they are less credible Witnesses in their own Case than they were in his. So that to us the *History* of the *New Testament*, granting it to be written by the *Apostles*, is of no more Authority, than their Writing it, considered only with respect to their natural and moral Capacities and Qualifications, could give to it; because that *Seal of Miracles* which is said to have been affixed thereto by God, is now by Length of Time quite worn off; or at least the Impression thereof is now so defaced, that we cannot distinguish whose *Seal* it was, or whether it was a true *Seal* or a counterfeit one; and that this *Seal* was ever affixed to their Testimony, is testified only by those same Witnesses, whose the Testimony it self was.

To this Objection therefore, which, it must be confessed, has some Appearance of Weight and Reason in it, I answer,

1. By denying the Ground it is built upon, viz. that the Testimony of the *Apostles* themselves is the only Proof we have of the *Miracles* which they wrought for the Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*. For besides the Testimony of the *Apostles*, in their *Epistles*, and in the *Acts*, witnessing their own *Miracles*, we have likewise the Testimony of all the other *Christian Writers*, whose Books are preserved, that lived in or near the *Apostles* Times, witnessing the same Thing: And this Testimony, not only given as it were in secret, in order to the making *Profelytes* of such as they found to be easy and credulous, but in the most publick Manner, in those *Apologies* for the *Christian Faith* which they presented to *Magistrates*, and published to the whole *World*; in which, for Proof that these *Miracles* had been wrought by the *Apostles*, they appeal to all the *Histories* and *Records* of the *Apostles* Times then extant; in which, they challenge any that could do it, to contradict their Testimony; in which, they testify that the same miraculous Power did still continue in the *Christian Church*, and was sometimes exerted, often enough, and openly enough, to prove its Being, tho' not so frequently as it had been by the *Apostles* themselves, when there was more Need of shewing it, viz. at their first preaching of the Gospel.

Now

Now these Things, if they had not been true, the first *Christians*, in the Circumstances they were then in, would not have dared to affirm; and if they had been false, they might easily have been disproved, and they would most certainly have been at least boldly denied and contradicted, by the professed Adversaries of the *Christian* Faith. But *they* did not deny or contradict, *they* did not offer to disprove the Report that was then generally believed of the *Miracles* that had been done by the Apostles: Nay so far were they from this, that there is good Evidence from Antiquity still remaining, that several even of those who took upon them to oppose the *Christian* Doctrine, did yet expressly own that great and mighty Works had indeed been done by the Hands of the Apostles, as well as of their Master; but then they had been done, they said, (and that was all they could say in the Case) by *Magick Art*, by the *Help* of the *Devil*; just as the *Jews* had said before of our Saviour, Matth. xii. 24. *This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

I shall not stay now to shew how groundless as well as malicious this Suggestion was with reference both to our *Lord's* Miracles and to *theirs*; because I suppose I shall have a better Occasion to do it hereafter in my next Discourse: It is enough for my present Purpose, if the Matter of Fact only be granted, *viz.* that the Apostles did do many *Miracles* in the Name of *Christ*, and to confirm their Testimony concerning him; and that they did so, cannot, I say, be reasonably doubted, because it is witnessed not only by *themselves*, but by all the *Christian Writers* of those or the succeeding Times, and is not denied. nay is granted, even by their *Adversaries* and *Opposers*. But,

2. If we had not so good Proof of the *Miracles* done by the Apostles, if there were no Witnesses thereof but themselves, I say however that their Testimony alone would be very credible: Nay indeed the Thing testified by them must, I think, necessarily have been acknowledged by us, altho' there had been no History or Record at all of it transmitted to our Times. I do not mean that without the Light of History we could have known that they did just those very *Miracles* which are recorded; but I say that without this we might have known in general that they did do *Miracles*, or that they were assisted by a *supernatural Power*; this, I say, we might have been sure of, by the *permanent Effects* of such a *Power*, continuing after their Times, and testified by all Historians, *Heathen* as well as *Christian*, of all Ages ever since, and which are even still extant and visible.

For that a great Part of the World is now *Christian*, we see and know, and that it has been so for many Ages past we are as sure, as we are that there have been many Ages past before our own; and looking back to see when and how it came to be so, we learn, by the concurrent Testimony of all History, *Jewish*, *Pagan*, and *Christian*, that *Christianity* had its Beginning in *Judea*, just at that Time in which the sacred History places it; and by the same concurrent Testimony of all History we learn that in a very short Time, in less than forty Years after, it was preached in all the Provinces of the *Roman Empire*, and in all other Countries of the World that were then known, and of which we have any History left; and that wherever, it was preached it made a very swift Progress, insomuch that in a few Years the Number of *Christians* became very considerable and bore a great Proportion to the People of all other Religions: For it was not much above threescore Years after the Apostles had dispersed themselves in order to preach the Gospel to the *Gentiles*, when *Pliny* Proconsul of *Bithynia*, wrote that Epistle to the Emperor *Trajan*, wherein giving an Account of the *Christians* then under a severe Persecution for their Religion by the Emperor's Order, he tells him, *That there was a great Number of Men ob-*

noxious

noxious to Sufferings upon that Account; that many of all Ages, of all Orders and Degrees, and of both Sexes, were every Day called in Question for it; that the Contagion of that Superstition, as he calls it, had spread it self not only in great Cities, but also in Towns and Country Villages, insomuch that the Temples of the Heathen Gods had for some Time before been in a Manner desolate, and their Worship and Sacrifices intermitted.

Now this is certain, that there can be no Effect without a Cause of sufficient Power to produce it; and it was evidently impossible that *Christianity* should make so swift a Progress, and prevail so much in the World, as it did, in so short a Time, only by natural Means. For without good Skill in the Languages of the several Nations, wherein the Apostles were to preach the Gospel, it had been in vain for them to have gone about to convert all Nations: Or if they had attempted it, it is impossible it should have been with Success. And how can it be conceived possible that *twelve grown Men*, who before understood not a Word of any but their own Mother Tongue, and that perhaps not well; who had never been bred up to *Study*, and who were then past the proper *Age* of learning Languages; should yet be able in so short a Time to become perfect Masters of all the *Languages* then in Use in the World, so as to speak them readily and fluently, as if every one had been their own native Tongue? and that after this, they should have Time enough still left, to go and preach the Gospel in all Countries? So that the speedy Conversion to Christianity of such a great Number of Men in all Parts of the World, by their Ministry, is a direct Proof of that *Gift of Tongues* wherewith we believe they were endued; and whoever can believe that they had *this Gift*, which was peculiar and extraordinary, and such as had never been heard of in the World before, may, I think, more easily believe all the other *Miracles* that they are reported to have done, which were not near so wonderful, which were such as had been done by other Prophets in former Times.

But suppose this Story of the *Gift of Tongues* to be false, and that indeed the Apostles were Men of such ready natural *Parts* as to be able to learn all the *Languages* which they could have any Use of in as few Days as it would have taken other Men Years to do it in; or else that they had in Truth been bred up to the *Study of Languages* from their Childhood, and only concealed their Knowledge thereof until that famous Day of *Pentecost*, that so then it might be taken to be miraculous; yet what could *twelve Men*, furnished with this excellent Skill, do by their own *natural Power* only, towards the Conversion of the World to *Christianity* in so short a Time?

For it is to be considered, that the Religion which they were to preach in the World, was the most *contrary* that could be to the *carnal Lusts* and *Passions* of Men; that it promised no worldly Greatness, no Increase of Riches, no Enjoyment of sensual Pleasures; but on the contrary taught all those that embraced it, to be mortified to all these Things, and not to set their Affections on any Thing here below.

It is to be considered also, that it proposed to Men's Belief such Doctrines, as to the carnal Minds of Men could not but appear *foolish* or *incredible*: As that the eternal *Son* of God did for our Sakes become Man, and take on him the *Form* of a *Servant*; that in that Form he submitted to be scornfully used, cruelly scourged, and at last barbarously crucified as a vile Malefactor by his own Creatures; that this same *Jesus* was afterwards declared to be the Son of God with Power, by the Resurrection from the Dead, that he was taken up into Heaven, seated at the right Hand of the Father, had all Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, was ordered to be worshiped and adored by all Men with the same Honour where-

with they honour the Father, and was appointed by God to be judge of the Quick and Dead, &c.

It is to be consider'd likewise, that it was a Religion perfectly *destructive* of all other *Forms of Religion* then receiv'd or establish'd in the World; and upon that Account only must needs meet with the strongest Prejudices; all the Men it was preached to being before from their Childhood bred up, and already fixed in another Way.

And lastly, it is to be consider'd farther, that the *Facts* upon which this Religion was grounded, that is, by which the divine Mission of the Lord *Jesus* was proved, *viz.* his *miraculous Works*, were such as being above the known Power of natural Causes were not like to be easily *credited*. That he healed the Sick, that he gave Sight to the Blind, Hearing to the Deaf, Speech to the Dumb, Feet to the Lame, and Strength to the Cripples; that he did cast out Devils; that he rais'd the Dead, and all these only with a Word's speaking; that he fed sometimes great Multitudes of four or five Thousand with only so much Bread and Fish, as to Appearance was not sufficient for twenty Men; and that after they were all satisfied, there was more in Bulk left in Fragments than there had been before in whole Provision; that he walked on the Water as on dry Land; that he had the Winds and Seas obedient to his Command; and above all, that he rais'd himself to Life after he had been three Days dead: These and such like were strange Stories to be told to Men, in order to persuade them to take upon them a new Religion.

What then, I say, could *twelve Men*, tho' ever so well furnished naturally with Parts and Learning, and all other Endowments proper to qualify them for such a Work, do towards the persuading the World to embrace *Christianity*? Suppose they had gone, not as they did, one into this Country, another into that; often singly, seldom more than two in a Company; but *all together* in a Body, into some one Country remote from *Judea*, and there with *concurrent Testimony* born Witness of the Things they had seen and heard; yet who would have believ'd their Report? The Report of Strangers coming from a far Country, and of whose Honesty and Truth they could have no Assurance but only from themselves vouching for one another? Who would have given Credit to a Relation of such incredible Stories, told with a Design to introduce a Religion that was unknown to their Fathers? And such a ridiculous Religion too, as this, at the first Proposal, would probably appear; *viz.* the Worshipping as *GOD*, a Man, who by their own Confession, was rejected and set at nought, and at last crucified as a wicked Malefactor by his own Countrymen.

Or if it can be supposed, that the *Apostles*, by the Boldness of their Speech and the *inticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, might after some Time have prevailed upon some few to become Profelytes to their Religion; yet the Multitude of their Disciples could not have been very great, before the *Government* of the Country would have taken the Alarm, and have called in Question these *Setters forth of new Gods*, these *Movers of Sedition among the People*, as they would certainly have been accounted, and as in fact the *Apostles* were accounted in every Place where they came. And this would quickly have put a Stop to a growing *Sect*: They that liked the Religion well enough before, because it was new, would quickly have left off to like it, when they saw it would be dangerous to profess it. It is not likely their Followers would have continued to stick to them, when they perceiv'd the Government and the whole Nation in general engaged on the other Side, and resolved by all means possible to extirpate the Belief they had entertained; and when they saw their Preachers imprisoned and scourged, tortur'd and put to Death, they would quickly have deserted the Service of a *Master*, who, they would then readily think, was not of Power to *save* either *himself* from the *Cross*, or his *Disci-*

ples from Suffering. And after this, had the *Residue* of the *Apostles*, who might possibly have escaped Martyrdom in this Country, gone into another, there they must have expected the like Reception and Usage; and not better in a third; and so in a few Years their Lives would have spun out in doing nothing, and their Religion would have perish'd with themselves.

And if their united Testimony would have had so little Credit, much less can it be supposed, that the *single Witness* of *one Apostle* only could ever have gain'd any Credit at all; and yet unless the Testimony of some single Witnesses had been believ'd, it is impossible there should have been, in so short a Time, so great a Conversion of Men to *Christianity* in all Parts of the World, by the preaching of so few Men.

So that whoever believes that *Christianity* could make so swift and so great a Progress as it is certain by all History it did, only by the *preaching* of the *Apostles* without any *miraculous Gifts* or *supernatural Assistance*, wants not Faith enough to be a Christian, if he had but a Will to it; for he believes already a much greater Miracle than any that is recorded in the *Evangelical Story*.

And now by all that hath been said, in this and the last Discourse, I hope it appears that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to the *Authors* of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their Relations of those Matters of Fact which they have recorded. This I am sure I may say, that there is not so good Reason to give Credit to any History in the World besides, of the same Antiquity; and that a History so well confirmed as this is cannot reasonably be rejected, nor indeed any ways be discredited, but either by some other *more credible History* contradicting it, or by some *intrinsic Evidence* of Falseness.

But better or *more credible History* contradicting it, I have already observ'd, there is not; nor indeed is there any History contradicting it that is of sufficient Antiquity to disprove it: Nay, there are many very considerable Things of those recorded in the *Gospel History*, that are occasionally mentioned by other *Historians* of those or the succeeding Times, who had no Design thereby to do any Service to *Christianity*; as namely that there was such a Man as *John the Baptist*, that he was a Person of great Piety and Austerity, and a Preacher of Righteousness, and that he was put to Death by *Herod*; that there was also a Man named *Jesus*, who called himself, and was own'd by many to be the *Christ*, that he did many wonderful Things, and was at last crucified by the *Jews*. The Names of some other Persons likewise spoken of in the *Gospel History* are mention'd under the same Character in some other Histories, as *Pilate*, *Felix*, *Festus*, *Caiaphas*, *Agrippa*, &c. In other Histories also we find Notice taken of the Cruelty of *Herod*, in slaying the Infants at *Bethlehem*, and among them, as it is thought, his own Son; which made *Augustus*, when the Story was told him, to say, that it was *better to be Herod's Swine than his Son*; and likewise of that remarkable Eclipse of the Sun, when the Moon was at the full, which the *Evangelists* say happen'd at the Time of our *Saviour's* Passion; and of that violent Earthquake that was at the same Time; and lastly, of the prodigious Increase of *Christianity* in all Parts of the *Roman Empire*, soon after its first Publication.

And if upon this Occasion it should be said, that the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History*, and the Events that follow'd thereupon, were so very wonderful and remarkable, that if they had been true, they must in all Probability have been *more* taken notice of than they are in other Histories; I answer, that supposing them to be true, it could not be reasonably expected that more Mention should have been made of them by other *Historians* than there really is; because they were plainly foreign to their Purpose, or else such Stories as tho' they had heard of them they did not believe, having perhaps never taken any Pains to examine into the Truth of them. For what was it to the

Purpose

Purpose of an *Author* that was writing the *Life* of one of the *Roman Emperors*, or the *History* of some famous *War*, or giving an Account of the Affairs of the *Civil State*, to make a large Digression concerning a *Religious Sect* begun in *Judea*, by a Person that was *despised* in his own Country, and carried on and continued by *mean* and *contemptible* Persons who made no Figure in the World? Or how could it be expected that an Historian who was not himself a *Christian*, should yet give a large Account of the *Miracles* of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, and other Facts upon which our Religion is grounded; which had he believ'd, as he must be supposed to have done, if he had deliver'd them to Posterity as Truths, he must have been a *Christian*? It is enough in all Reason, and as much as could be expected in this Case, supposing these Facts to be true, that they are not by any Historians that were of another Religion, contradicted or attempted to be disprov'd: More than this would have been too much. And should we now in some ancient Manuscript History new brought to Light, and bearing the Name of some *Jewish* or *Heathen* Author, find a large and formal Account of any of those Facts relating to the *Christian* Religion that are recorded in the Gospel; this would give very just Ground to suspect, that the whole History, whatever other Appearance it had of Truth, was forged and counterfeit, or at least that those Passages speaking honourably of the *Christian* Religion, or the Author of it, were knavishly foisted into the Book by some *Christian Transcriber*. For this is indeed the best Argument that is brought to discredit some Passages of this Kind that are now to be found in some *Heathen* or *Jewish* Historians, and particularly in *Josephus*, viz. that they say more than was proper or likely to be said by *Heathens* or *Jews*; that if those Passages are genuine, and the Authors had believed what they themselves wrote, they must have been *Christians*.

Now this I am sure is not fair Dealing, that the *Paucity* and *Slenderiness* of those *corroborating Testimonies* to the Truth of the *Christian History* that are to be met with in other Historians, and that the *Multitude* and *Fulness* of such Testimonies, should *both* be urged as Arguments against *Christianity*. And therefore when they are both urged, as they are and have been by our Adversaries, we may reasonably conclude, that the Truth is in the Mean; and that there are indeed no *more*, nor no *fewer* Testimonies of this Kind to be met with in other Writers, and that they are not either *more* or *less* to the Purpose, than, supposing the *Christian History* to be true, might fairly be expected.

It only remains then, that we enquire whether there be in the *Gospel History* any *intrinsic Evidences* of Falshood. And it is pretended by the Adversaries of our Religion, that there are many such; for there are, they say, some Things related in the *Gospel History*, that are altogether *incredible*; and there is, say they, oftentimes great *Difference*, in the several Relations of the same Story, by the several *Evangelists*; and not only so, but there are, they say, besides, in their several Histories compared together, some flat *Contradictions* and *Repugnancies*.

I intended therefore at the End of this Discourse, if I had *had* Time for it, to have spoken largely upon this Subject; but because I have not, must refer you to those Books that have been written on purpose to give an Account of the difficult Texts of Scripture, and to reconcile those that are seemingly repugnant; or for want of such Books to any good Commentary on the Bible, in which you will hardly fail to meet with Satisfaction in any Difficulty of this Kind, if you read it with a Mind disposed to receive Satisfaction. And I shall conclude this Discourse with only observing in general,

1. That the pretended *Impossibilities* that are said to be related in the sacred History, are only *Difficulties*; they are indeed Events above and beyond the known

known Power and common Course of Nature, but they are such as are easily credible when they are ascribed, as they must be, to the Almighty Power of God.

2. That the *Difference* that may sometimes be observ'd in the several Relations of the same Story by the several *Evangelists*, is very *inconsiderable*; consisting only in this, That one perhaps relates the Story in a different Order of Things than another does; or that one tells it briefly, another more at large; or one with a few, another with more Circumstances; or that some Circumstances are mentioned by each of them which the other had omitted. So that this Observation is so far from being a just Objection against the Truth of the History, that it is rather a *Proof* and *Confirmation* of it; for it is an Argument that the *Evangelists* did not confer together in the writing of their Histories, and that they did not copy or transcribe from one another; but that every one of them reported the Story he wrote in such Manner as he himself remembred it to have been, and with such Circumstances as he himself took most Notice of. And,

3. As to the *Repugnancies* and *Inconsistences* that are said to be in the *Evangelical History*; these we absolutely deny. I have not Time now to consider, or attempt to reconcile all the Places that are pretended to be contradictory to each other; but those Passages which seem most liable to this Exception, are, I think, the Relation of *Judas's Death*, and the Account of our *Saviour's Genealogy*.

Mat. xxvii. 5. But as to the first, there is plainly no *Impossibility*, no *Contradiction* in it, if we should say that after he had *hanged himself*, as St. Matthew says, he did *fall down*, and that *his Bowels gush'd out*, as St. Luke affirms; or it may be that he did not hang himself, but only was * *choaked* or suffocated by the Violence of his Grief, and that the same Passion by which he was strangled, made him also *fall down headlong*, and *burst asunder in the midst*, so that all *his Bowels gushed out*.
Acts i. 18.
* ἀπὸ θυμοῦ.

Deut. xxv. 5. And as to the other, when it is remembred that by the *Jewish Law* the next of Kin was to raise up Seed to his near Relation that died without Issue, by marrying his Widow, and that the First-born of the Woman after such second Marriage was reputed in *Law* the *Son*, as well as he was the *Heir*, of the *deceased*; so that consequently the same Person might be the *legal Son* of one Man, and the *natural Son* of another Man; tho' it may be difficult, perhaps impossible, for us at this Distance of Time, to say with Certainty which of the two different Lines, by which our *Saviour's* Pedigree is deduced from *David*, is the *legal*, and which the *natural* Line; it is very easy nevertheless to believe, that one is the *legal*, and that the other is the *natural* Line. And if so, there is plainly no Contradiction between the two *Evangelists*, altho' St. Matthew makes our *Saviour* to be descended from *Solomon*, and St. Luke from *Nathan*; altho' St. Matthew says that *Joseph*, the Husband of the *blessed Virgin*, was the Son of *Jacob*, and St. Luke that he was the Son of *Heli*.
Mat. i. 16.
Luke iii. 23.

And now the *Truth* of the *Gospel History* being, as I hope, by what hath been said *sufficiently established*; I should proceed to shew, That if the Matters of Fact related in the New Testament are true, *they are sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught: But I am sensible that I have trespassed too much upon your Patience already, and so shall reserve this for the Subject of my next Discourse.

DISCOURSE XCIII.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture-
Revelation ;As to the *Proof* of it. PART III.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.**And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.**And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.*

N Order to shew, that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the Truth and Authority of the *New Testament*, and of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it, I have formerly propounded to shew,

I. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe, that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

II. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded : And,

III. That if the *Matters of Fact* therein recorded are true, *they* are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught. And the two first of these Points I have, I hope, already made good.

I proceed now to the third ; *viz.*

III. To shew, that the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* is well grounded upon the *History* of it ; that if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *New Testament* are true, *they* are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And here, by the *Doctrines* of the *Gospel*, I understand both the *Articles of Faith*, which it proposes to our *Belief*, and the *Rules* which it prescribes to our *Practice*: Many of the former of which are themselves *Parts* of the *Gospel History*, as the *Incarnation, Life, Sufferings, Death, Resurrection* and *Ascension* of our *Saviour*; and the rest, of both Sorts, are taught in the *New Testament*, either by our *Saviour* himself, or by his *Apostles*.

And I suppose it will be readily granted, that all *their Doctrines* are true, and also of *divine Authority*, if it shall appear that *they* were *commissioned* and *sent* by God to instruct the World; for *he whom God hath sent, speaketh the Words of God. Joh. iii. 34.*

The single Point therefore to be considered at this Time, is, whether there be *sufficient Evidence*, from the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *History* of the *New Testament*, that our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* were *commissioned* and *sent* by God to instruct the World.

And *first*, whether there be *sufficient Evidence* from *thence* that our *Saviour* himself was a *Teacher sent* from God.

Now that he *said* he was sent from God, is a *Matter of Fact*, and a *Part* of the *Gospel History, Joh. xii. 49. I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a Commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.*

And that he *said* that he was the *Messiah* which had been foretold by the *Prophets*, is likewise *Matter of Fact*, and a *Part* of the same *History, Joh. iv. 25, 26. The Woman of Samaria saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all Things: Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee, am he.*

See Joh. v. 37.
38. viii. 38.
xiv. 10. 24.
Matth. xvi. 16.
17.
Mark ix. 41.
Luke xxiv. 46.
Joh. ix. 47.

The Question therefore is, whether from the *Things* which are recorded of him by the *Evangelists*, there be *sufficient Grounds* to believe the Truth of *either* or *both* these Pretences; I say, of *either* or *both* of them, because *either* of them is a *sufficient Reason* to receive his *Doctrine* as *true* and *divine*. For which Cause therefore I shall not, in speaking to this Subject, distinguish between the *Evidences* which the *Gospel History* affords of his being a *Prophet*, and those which it affords of his being the *Messiah*, but shall propose them promiscuously as they come to Mind.

And here I shall consider, *first*, the *Credibility* of our *Saviour's* own *Testimony* concerning *himself*, and *secondly*, the *Confirmation* that was given to this Testimony by God; grounding all that shall be said on both these Heads, upon the *Gospel History*; the Truth of which I now take for granted, as being, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd.

First then, I shall consider the *Credibility* of our *Saviour's* own *Testimony* concerning *himself*, when he *said* that he was *sent* by God, and that he was the *Christ* the *Son of God*.

And I know it is commonly said that a Man is not to be believed in his own Case: And this very Thing was objected to our *Saviour* by the *Jews, Joh. viii. 13. Thou bearest Record of thy self, thy Record is not true.* But this Saying is not without Exception.

When indeed what a Man witnesses is for his *own Benefit*, his Testimony, if it be single, may reasonably be rejected; especially, if any Proof be made that at other Times he hath told a *Lye*; or done any other *ill Thing* for his Advantage: But otherwise a Man's Testimony concerning *himself* may be credible; nay, in some Cases it may be more credible than another Man's; because he may sometimes be *surer* of what he says concerning himself than another Man could be. And therefore our *Saviour*, who in *Joh. v. 31.* allows of the Reasonableness of that Saying; *If I bear witness of my self my witness is not true*; yet when this very Thing was afterwards objected to him by the *Pharisees*, in the Place before-cited, makes answer in the following

following Words ; *Tho' I bear Record of my self, yet my Record is true, for* John viii. 14. I know whence I came, &c.

And that the Testimony of our Lord concerning his own divine Mission was such as we might rationally give Credit to, tho' we had no other Evidence of it, will, I suppose sufficiently appear, if these following Things be considered.

1. That his whole *Life*, according to the Account that is given of it by the *Evangelists*, which we now build upon as true, was in all Respects spotless and unblameable; he did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth: He was a Lamb without Blemish, and without Spot. And this he himself urges as a Reason why his Testimony ought to be credited; *Joh. viii. 46. Which of you convinceth me of Sin? and if I say the Truth, why do ye not believe me?* And a very good Reason it was; for it could not justly be suspected, that a Person of whom no other ill Thing could be said, was yet indeed in the whole Course of his Life guilty of a Crime of the greatest Magnitude, viz. of *Lying* in the Name of God; of saying, that the Lord had sent him, when indeed the Lord had not sent him, nor spoken by him.

2. It may be also considered, that this Testimony of our Lord, tho' it was concerning himself, yet was not for himself; I mean it was not for his own worldly Advantage. And this Consideration he himself likewise offers to the *Jews*, as an Argument of the Truth of his Testimony, *Joh. vii. 18. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own Glory; but he that seeketh his Glory that sent him, the same is true, and no Unrighteousness is in him.* Had the Doctrine of our Lord, which he pretended was what God had commanded him to teach, been contrived to advance the worldly Honour and Greatness of himself or his Followers; this would have been a just Prejudice against it, and a reasonable Ground of suspecting that he spake of himself: But when it was evident to all that heard his Discourses, and is no less so to us that read them, that he sought not his own Glory in any Thing, but the Glory of him that sent him; and that his whole Doctrine tended to advance the Honour of God; and to promote the Practice of Piety and Virtue in the World; this rendered his Testimony very credible, when he said he was sent by God to teach it to the World; for when a Doctrine is plainly worthy of God, and according to Godliness, it may reasonably be presumed that God is the Author of it.

3. It may be farther considered, that this Testimony of our Lord concerning himself was so far from being to his own Benefit, that it was as much as any Thing could possibly be to his worldly Disadvantage; exposing him to the Envy and Malice of the *Jews*, and to the Jealousy of the *Romans*, and to all the cruel Sufferings which he endured from both of them. And certainly a Man's Testimony concerning himself may be allowed to be credible, if it be against his own Interest, if he himself be a great Loser or Sufferer by what he testifies; for it cannot be imagined what else but only the Evidence of Truth, and an Obligation to declare it, should ever induce a Man to say such Things concerning himself, as will procure his own Mischief.

And I know not what can be said to avoid the Force of this Argument for the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony that he was sent from God, and that he was the *Messiah*; unless it be, that he was disappointed in his Expectation, and that he hoped to have made himself rich and great in the World by these glorious Preferances, tho' in the Event it proved otherwise. But the Gospel History furnishes us with a very clear and full Answer to this Objection in those many Predictions of our Lord therein recorded concerning his own Sufferings; whereby it clearly appears, that the Sufferings which

Matth. xvi. 31
-----xx. 17.

which befel him for giving this Testimony concerning himself, did not happen to him *unexpectedly*, but that he knew long before all that afterwards came to pass. And therefore I say again, that no Reason can be imagin'd why he should say that he was sent from God, but only because he knew it was true, and had receiv'd a Command from his Father to declare this Truth to the World. Especially if it be consider'd farther,

4. Lastly, That he continued to testify the same at his *Death*, which he had done before in his Life, giving thereby the best Assurance that a Man can give of the Truth of his Testimony. For the main Matter of his Accusation to *Pilate* was, that he had given out himself to be the *Messiah*, and the *Messiah* was, according to the Expectation of the *Jews*, to be a great temporal *King*; had our *Lord* therefore but denied this Charge, had he but granted that he was not the *Messiah*, he might have saved his Life. But this he would not do; he disowned indeed the *false Notion* that the *Jews* had of the *Messiah*; *my Kingdom*, says he, *is not of this World*; but that he was a *King*, and that he was the *Messiah*, he boldly owned, as well when the Question was put to him by the *Roman Governor*, who had Power of Life and Death, as when it had been put to him before by the *High-Priest*. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of this Testimony of our *Lord*; and is alone sufficient to make it credible, that he *witnessed* the same good Confession before *Pontius Pilate*, which he had done before his own Nation, and sealed his Witness with his Blood. For it is not to be supposed, that any Man tells a known Lie for nothing; and it was plainly then too late for him, to hope for any Good to himself in this World by persisting in this Testimony; his only Hope had been in retracting it: And it is not credible, that any Man should be so foolish, as to expect to better himself in the other World, by dying with a Lie in his Mouth.

Thus, I hope, it appears, that the *Testimony* of our *Lord* concerning his *own divine Mission* was *credible in it self*; so that we might rationally believe, that he *came* from God, and that he was *Christ the Son of God*, altho' we had *had* only his own Word for it.

But we have more than his own Word for it; *I am not alone*, says he, *John* viii. 16, &c. *but I and the Father that sent me*. It is also written in your Law, that the Testimony of two Men is true: *I am one that bear Witness of my self, and the Father that sent me beareth Witness of me*. And this was the other Thing I proposed to consider, in order to shew the good Reason that we have to believe that our Saviour was sent from God, and that he was the *Messiah*; viz.

Secondly, The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony of our *Lord*, by God himself. And this was given several ways.

1. God bare him Witness by the Testimony of ancient Prophets; and to this our Saviour frequently appeals, *John* v. 39. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me*. And again, v. 46. *Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me*. And this St. Peter, comparing it with that Voice from Heaven, testifying him to be the Son of God, of which he himself had been an Ear-witness, calls a more sure Word of Prophecy: And indeed it was as certain an Evidence of his divine Mission as could be desir'd.

For it was a Matter of the greatest Concern to the World, to discern the promis'd *Messiah*, that so they might know in whom to believe, and from whom to expect Salvation: And to this End God was pleased, by the Mouth of all his holy Prophets since the World began, to give several Marks and Characters of the *Messiah*, by which he might be certainly known, and readily distinguish'd from all Impostors; for they foretold exactly the Time of his Coming, his Pedigree, and the Place of his Birth, the Manner of his Life, the

John xviii. 26.
Matt. xxvii.
11.

John xviii. 37.
Matt. xxvi. 63.

64.
Mark xiv. 61.

62.

1 Tim. vi. 13.

2 Pet. i. 18,
19.

the *Things* he was to *do*, the *Sufferings* he was to *undergo*, and all the remarkable *Accidents* that were to befall him in this World; all which Predictions were punctually fulfill'd in the Person of our blessed *Saviour*, as must be granted by every one that allows the Truth of the *Gospel History*. And this is an undeniable Proof that he was the *Messiah*; for it is manifestly inconsistent with the *Wisdom* of *God*, when he meant to give *Marks* and *Characters* by which the *Messiah* might be certainly known, to give only such as might belong to *another Person* no less than to *him*: And it is no less inconsistent with his *Goodness*, that his Providence should ever permit, that all the *Marks* and *Characters* of the true *Messiah* should meet together in an *Impostor*; because by this, Mankind must have lain under an inevitable Necessity of being cheated, in a Matter of the greatest Consequence to their eternal Salvation.

But the ancient Prophecies of *Christ* were many of them in Types or figurative Expressions, not readily to be understood 'till they were accomplish'd, nor then very easy to be applied by every one to the Person of the true *Messiah*, without the Help of a Teacher. *How can I understand what I* Acts viii. 31. *read*, said the *Eunuch*, even when he was reading one of the plainest Prophecies of *Christ* that is in the *Old Testament*, *except some Man should guide me*? And therefore *God* was pleased to give a yet more certain and distinct Knowledge of him to the Men of that Generation in which he appear'd; And this he did.

2. By the *Testimony* of *John the Baptist*, who was a *burning and a shining Light*; and did not, as the former Prophets had done, only lay down *Marks* and *Characters*, by the wise Application whereof Men might discern the *Messiah* when they saw him; but *pointed* to him, as it were with his *Finger*, as he stood before their Eyes, so that the simplest among them could not but know whom he meant: *Behold*, says he, *the Lamb of God, which* John i. 29, 30. *taketh away the Sin of the World. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a Man which is preferred before me.*

And to this *Testimony* of *John* our *Saviour* himself frequently appealed, as to a *Testimony* that was full to the Purpose, and could not be denied: *Te* sent unto *John*, says he, *and he bare Witness unto the Truth*, John v. 32. And when the *Chief Priests* and *Elders* question'd him about his Authority, Matt. xxi. 23, he perfectly confounded them, by only asking them whether the *Baptism of* *John* *was from Heaven, or of Men*; for that *John* was a *Prophet*, altho' he did no Miracles, was so evident to all by the wonderful Manner of his Birth, and the miraculous Circumstances that attended it, that they could not; and he was also so generally receiv'd, and accepted among the People as a *Prophet*, that they dared not, deny it: *If*, say they, *we shall say of Men, all the People will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a Prophet.* And yet had they granted this, which they could not deny, they had answer'd their own Question, and seen clearly by what Authority our *Saviour* acted and taught; for no *Testimony* of his divine Mission could be plainer and clearer than that of *John* was; and it was a Thing granted by the *Jews*, that *he is a Prophet without all Doubt, and needs no farther Trial, unto whom another Prophet bears Witness.*

3. Another Way by which *God* gave Witness to our *Saviour*, that he was sent by him, and that he was the *Messiah*, was by a *Voice* from *Heaven*; which *Testimony* was given him three Times.

First, at his *Baptism*, when *being come up out of the Water, the Heavens* Matt. iii. 16, *opened, and the Spirit like a Dove descended upon him, and there came a* 17. *Voice from Heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well* Mark i. 10, 11. *pleased.* And of this *Voice*, it is highly probable, St. *John Baptist* was an Ear- Luke iii. 22. witness; for it is said expressly, that *he saw the Spirit descending like a Dove* John i. 32.

from Heaven, and abiding on him, and that was at the same Time that the Voice was utter'd.

Ex. xxiv. 15. A second Time was at his *Transfiguration* on the *Mount*, when the Glory
 of God appearing in a Cloud, as it had anciently us'd to do, there came a
 Voice out of the Cloud which said, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am*
 well pleased, hear ye him. And at the uttering of this Voice, three of his
 Apostles were present, two of which have witnessed the same to us under their
 own Hands.

A third Time was after the raising of *Lazarus*, when were present not on-
 ly his Apostles who constantly accompanied him, but several others both *Jews*
 and *Greeks*. And this Voice was so loud as to be heard by all that were pre-
 sent, tho' not by all so distinctly and articulately, as it was by some, who, as
 it is probable, were nearer than the rest; which was the Occasion of that Dif-
 ference that was among the People concerning it, some saying that it thun-
 dred, and others, that an Angel spake to him. To doubt therefore of his
 divine Mission whom God thus testified to by Voices from Heaven, is to
 make God himself a Liar, as the Apostle speaks, because we receive not the
 Record that he gave of his Son.

4. Another Way by which God gave Witness to the divine Mission of
 our Saviour was by enduing him with the Gift of Prophecy, or foretelling
 Things to come: Several Instances of which we meet with in the Gospel-
 History; for he foretold very often his own Sufferings and Death, with all
 the remarkable Circumstances thereof. He said that he should be betray'd by
 one of his own Disciples, when none of them suspected that there was a
 false Brother among them, and the Traytor himself knew not yet the False-
 ness of his own Heart. He told Peter but a few Hours before, that he should
 deny him thrice; when he at the same Time was very confident of his own
 Strength, and declar'd himself resolv'd to die, rather than deny him once. He
 told the rest of the Disciples that they would all forsake him, when they eve-
 ry one profess'd themselves resolv'd to suffer with him, rather than leave him.
 He signified before by what Death he should die, and who should be instru-
 mental therein. He assured his Disciples, that after three Days he would rise
 again, and appointed them a Place in *Galilee*, where they should all see him.
 He prophesied that notwithstanding the Contempt he was had in, and the
 greater Contempt that his ignominious Death would bring upon him, his Re-
 ligion should by their means, a Company of poor illiterate Fishermen, be
 preached with good Success in all Parts of the World. He foretold likewise
 the utter Destruction of *Jerusalem* and the Temple, before that Generation
 passed away, and the Dispersion of the Jews into all Nations: And several
 other Things, which it would take up too much Time now to mention, he
 foretold should be, just in that Manner in which they afterwards came to
 pass.

Concerning which it may be noted, that some of his Prophecies were ful-
 filled soon after they were spoken, the punctual Accomplishment whereof
 was to those that both heard them spoken, and saw them fulfilled, an evident
 Proof of his prophetic Spirit, and a just Ground of expecting the Accom-
 plishment of all his other Prophecies in their Season; and that others were
 not to be fulfilled till a good while after, the Accomplishment whereof at
 the Time foretold, and long after the Predictions thereof had been recorded
 by the Evangelists, was a good Evidence to those that lived then, and is also
 to us that live now, and either read the Accomplishment thereof in History,
 or see the same with our own Eyes, that he was endued with a divine Spirit;
 and likewise takes away all reasonable Ground of a Suspicion, which we
 might otherwise have had, that in those Instances wherein both the Prophecy
 and

and the Accomplishment of it are related by the same Authors, the Prophecies were forged after the Events were come to pass.

Now if this be true, and it is certainly true; if the *Gospel History* be so; that our *Saviour* did foretell many Things which afterwards hapned, and those very casual and contingent Things, depending upon the Free-will of Men, this was an evident Token that he had a divine Spirit; for none can certainly foretell such Things but God only, or those whom he enlightens with his Spirit; and therefore the Prophet *Isaiah* made this challenge to the *Idols of the Heathens*, *Isa. xli. 23. Shew the Things that shall be hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.*

And if to this it should be objected, that future Events have been sometimes foretold, by such as have not been true Prophets of God, nor enlightened by his Spirit, as by *Diviners, Astrologers, and Sooth-sayers*, and by the *Oracles of the Heathens*; this may be granted without any weakning of the Argument I am now upon, for the Proof of our *Saviour's* divine Mission.

For there may be some future Events unforeseen by us, and yet depending so intirely upon the Course of natural Causes, that unless hindred by a Miracle, they will as certainly come to pass as the Sun will rise to Morrow; and these, the *Devil*, who understands much better than we do the Power and Course of Nature, may foresee, and consequently foretell; and when such a Thing is foretold, we, who understand very little of Nature, may think it a Prophecy, whereas in Truth, there is no more of a propheticall Spirit in the *Devil* when he foretells such Things, than there is in a skilful *Astronomer*, when he calculates and foretells to a Minute for several Ages to come, the Motions and Eclipses of the Sun, Moon, and Planets.

And even in future *Contingencies*, it is no Wonder that the Events have sometimes verified the Predictions of the *Devil* and his *Prophets*; for this also may well enough be accounted for, without allowing that any Being hath a certain Fore-knowledge of future Contingencies but God only; if we do but suppose, as we may very reasonably do, that the *Devil* hath a perfecter Knowledge than we can have, of the Counsels, Intrigues, and Interests of Men, that he understands their Tempers and Inclinations, that he hath lived a great while, and made very exact Observations, that he hath had a long Experience of Things, and hath also a notable Sagacity much beyond what is in any Man: For so even a wise, observing, and experienc'd Man, may without a Spirit of Prophecy, see much farther before him than Men commonly do, and may foretell, by a Guess that shall rarely fail, a great many Things which a less thinking and experienc'd Man would never have thought of; and when the Thing happens that was foretold, it may be past the Skill of others to judge, whether it was told by a sagacious Guess, or by a certain Fore-knowledge of what would be.

And that the Predictions of *Diviners*, and the *Oracles of the Heathens* concerning future *Contingencies*, have been no more than only probable Conjectures, unless when they have been borrowed from divine Prophecies, as they may have often been, is evident by their uncertain Accomplishment. Some Things indeed have hapned as they have been foretold, but others have not so hapned; and because the *Devil* could not always certainly tell what the Events of those Things would be, which he was consulted with about, he commonly gave out his *Oracles in ambiguous Expressions*, that so, whatever hapned, he might be thought to have foretold it. And when the Predictions of any Person pretending to Prophecy, have failed in some Instances, tho' in others they have been accomplished, this is a certain Argument that he did not prophesy by a divine Spirit; according to what is said, *Deut. xviii. 21, 22. If thou say in thine Heart, how shall we know the Word*

Word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord, if the Thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the Thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously. In which Words it seems to be implied, though it be not expressly said, that if the Thing foretold did come to pass, and especially that if of many Things which the Prophet had foretold; and which could not be fore-known by the greatest Skill in natural Causes, such as are the Actions of a free Agent; not one Thing failed, but his Words were made good by the Event in every Particular, they might then depend upon it that he was a *true Prophet*; except in one Case mentioned in *Deut. xiii.* viz. When he made Use of that Credit which the Accomplishment of his Predictions had gained him, to draw Men from the Worship of the true and only God, to the Worship of Idols. And accordingly it is observed in *1 Sam. iii. 19, 20.* that because the Lord did let none of Samuel's Words fall to the Ground, all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that he was established to be a Prophet of the Lord.

Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

The before-named Exception having therefore no Place in our Saviour, for his Doctrine was, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*; and there being not one of those many Predictions that he gave forth; tho' several of them were concerning the most casual Events that could be; which has not been in its due Time fulfilled; we may safely conclude that he was a true Prophet of God, and consequently, that he ought to be hearkned to in every Thing that he said.

Matth. iv. 10.

3. Another Testimony that was given by God to the divine Mission of our Saviour, was by the Power of working Miracles, more and greater Miracles than ever had been done before since the Beginning of the World, the Relation of which makes up a great Part of the Gospel History.

Mat. xi. 4, 5.

Jhn x. 25, 37, 38. xiv. 11. xv. 24.

And to these our Saviour himself frequently appeals, as to a most evident Proof that he was sent by God, and that he was the Son of God; *John v. 36. The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*

And indeed what better Evidence can be desired, that a Person speaking in the Name of God is sent by him, than to see him do the Works of God, that is, such Works as cannot be done but by the Power of God? And that our Saviour's Miracles were such, cannot, I think, be doubted by those who believe they are truly related in the Gospel, which it is now supposed they are.

And if to this it be said, that the first Opposers of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, who either saw the Miracles of our Saviour, or had such good Assurance thereof from Eye-witnesses, or credible History, that they could not deny them, yet were not thereby convinced that he was a Prophet of God, but rather thought that he did all his mighty Works by magick Art, and by the Help of the Devil: I answer,

1. That it is a Thing which we cannot be sure of, that the true Reason why any one of those who saw our Saviour's Miracles, or were persuaded of the Truth of them, did yet refuse to receive him as a Prophet sent from God, was, because they were not convinced that his Miracles were done by a divine Power; for Men do not always act according to their Judgments; for we read of some of the Chief Rulers in *John xii.* that they believed on him, that is, they were convinced in their Judgments, by the mighty Works that he did, that he was the Person he pretended to be, but they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God. And therefore I think it most probable, that they who attributed those Miracles of his which they could not deny, to the working of the Devil,

did

did not, nay could not, believe what they said; but only said it, because they were resolved never to receive a Doctrine, whatever Evidence was given of the Truth of it, that was so contrary as our *Saviour's* was, to their Prejudices, Lusts, and worldly Interests; and they could not tell what else to say, to justify themselves to the World. But,

2. If their Blasphemy in ascribing our *Saviour's* Miracles to the Power of the *Devil*, was not merely malicious, it was however most evidently groundless. For,

(1.) Though the *Devil* be without Doubt of much greater Power than we are, and understanding better than we do the Force of natural Causes, can do many Things which to the Eyes of Men may appear miraculous, because it may be past their Skill to give an Account of them by natural Causes; there is no Reason however to believe that he can do a true Miracle; that is, that he can ever alter the Course of Nature, or produce any Effect but by the Means of natural Causes, working in such a Manner, and by such Laws and Rules, as God hath appointed: And therefore the *Apostle* calls those strange Appearances which are done by the working of *Satan*, *lying Wonders*. 2 Theff. ii. 9.

But they were not *lying Wonders* which were done by our *Saviour*; they did not only seem to be done, but were done, and they were Miracles not only in Appearance but in Truth, being many of them such Effects as were evidently above and beyond the Power of Nature, and therefore such as could not be done but by a Power superior to Nature, that is, by God's.

For who, but he only who at first brought all Things out of nothing, Matth. xiv. Mark vi. Luke ix. John vi. Luk. vii. 11. &c. could with five Loaves, and two small Fishes, satisfy the Hunger of more than five thousand Persons, leaving a Remainder of more than twice the Number of Basketsfull of Fragments, that there had been Loaves at the first? Or who could restore to Life a dead Carcass that began to putrefy, John xi. 39. &c. but he only who first formed it out of the Dust of the Ground? Who could call back the departed Soul, and fix it to its former Residence, but he only into whose Hands it was returned, and who first breathed into our Bodies these immortal Spirits?

And as to some other of his Works which may be thought to be such as might be produced by the working of Nature only, the *Manner* in which they were done plainly shews, that they also were done by a Power superior to Nature. For thus, a sick Man may be restored to perfect Health, in Time, and by Degrees, by the Use of proper Medicines, and such a Cure we reckon natural: But those were plainly super-natural Cures which were wrought, as our *Saviour's* for the most Part were, without the Use of any Medicines, only by a Word's speaking, and many Times at a great Distance; and by which those who had been long sick or infirm, or Cripples, were restored to perfect Health and Strength in an Instant of Time. To suppose therefore that the *Devil* can thus at his Will alter the Course of Nature, is to attribute to him such a Power as is peculiar to the God of Nature, *who only doth great Wonders*. But, Psal. lxxii. 18. Cxxxvi. 4.

(2.) If the Miracles of our *Saviour* had been only such as we might reasonably think did not exceed the *Devil's* Power to do, yet that they were not wrought by his Help, and consequently that they were done by the Power of God, is abundantly evident from the *Design* of them; which was to establish a Doctrine the most contrary that could be to the *Devil's* Interest. For to this Purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the Works of the *Devil*; and he did it, by preaching to Men to turn from the Vanities of Idols to the Worship and Service of the living God, who made Heaven and Earth; and by teaching them to deny Ungodliness and

1 Joh. iii. 8. Acts xiv. 15. Tit. ii. 12.

and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.

Now the Devil is certainly as subtle as he is powerful; and therefore if he has indeed any Power to alter the Course of Nature, and to do a real Miracle, he would not however, we may be sure, make Use of this Power against himself, he would not thereby assist another to destroy his own Kingdom. And by this Argument our Saviour himself clearly confuted this Calumny, in *Matth. xii. 25*. When the Pharisees had said that he cast out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils; he answered, *Every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his Kingdom stand? And,*

(3.) Lastly, as it is not credible that the Devil has such Power; or if he has, and was let alone to himself, that he would make Use of this Power to destroy his own Kingdom; so neither is it credible, that almighty God, who has all Power in his Hands, and can controll and limit the Workings of the Devil and all created Beings, as he pleases, would ever permit the Devil to out-do himself in such wonderful Operations; so that more and greater Miracles should be done by an Impostor, than ever had been done before by any true Prophet; which yet is manifestly the Case, if indeed our Saviour was an Impostor.

2 Tim. iii. 8. He suffered indeed Jannes and Jambres to withstand his Servants Moses and Aaron for some Time, and to do, or seem to do, some wonderful Works like to theirs; for Aaron cast his Rod upon the Ground and it became a Serpent, and so did they: And Aaron stretched out his Hand over the Waters; and the Frogs came up and covered the Land; and the Magicians did so with their Incantments, and brought up Frogs upon the Land of Egypt. But tho' he suffered the Magicians thus to contend with his Prophet, the Victory was clearly on his Prophet's Side; for Aaron's Rod swallowed up their Rods; and when the Magicians endeavour'd by their Incantments to bring forth Lice, as Aaron had done, they could not; but were forced to own before Pharaoh that it was the Finger of God; and from that Time forward strove no more for Victory.

And thus it may be consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, at any Time, in order to prove his People, and to know whether they love the Lord with all their Heart, to suffer the Sign or Wonder foretold by an Inticer to Idolatry to come to pass; and to distinguish his elect from reprobates, to permit false Christs and false Prophets, to shew great Signs and Wonders; and in just Judgment upon such as will not receive the Love of the Truth that they may be saved; to let them alone to be deceived by that wicked one, whose Coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders, and with all Deceivableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish.

But it cannot, I think, be reconciled to these Attributes of God, that he should permit greater Wonders, and more clear and undoubted Miracles, to be done by a false Prophet, than ever were done by a true Prophet; because this would be too great a Trial for human Nature: Such Signs and Wonders would be sufficient to deceive even those that enquire after Truth with the greatest Sincerity of Heart. And I cannot conceive it consistent with the Goodness of God, to permit that such as are of honest Minds, and sincere Lovers of Truth, should, after a fair Examination of the Proofs on both Sides, have greater Reason to embrace Error than Truth; which yet they plainly have, in case Miracles done by false Prophets be more and greater than have been done by any true Prophet; unless the Falseness of the

Deut. xiii. 1.
&c.

Mat. xxiv. 24.

2 Thess. ii. 8,
9, 10.

Exod. vii. 10,
12.
Exod. viii. 6, 7.

Exod. vii. 12,
viii. 18.

the Doctrines which they would thereby establish be more evident than the Truth of their Miracles. So that upon the whole, I think we may well conclude this Head, with those Words of *Nicodemus* to our Saviour, *Joh. iii. 2. We know, (we are assured of it, we have no Reason to doubt of it) that thou art a Teacher come from God; for no Man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

6. Another Way by which God himself bare Witness to the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony, was by raising him from the dead. To this great Miracle he himself often referred those that had any Doubt of the Truth of his other Miracles, as what could not but be satisfactory to all that were capable of receiving Satisfaction. And this was the chief Subject of the Apostles Sermons, the main Proof that they insisted upon to convince Men that *Jesus* was the *Christ*: And they seem to have no Doubt upon them, that if they could but persuade Men of the Truth of his Resurrection, they would readily own that he was the *Christ*, and without farther Scruple receive every Thing that he had taught them in the Name of God, as a divine Truth. By this, say they, God has given Assurance unto all Men, that he has ordained him to be the Judge of the World: By this, say they, he was declared to be the Son of God with Power; because it was a Thing evident to all, that no Power less than God's could raise the dead.

*Joh. ii. 19.
Matth. xii. 40.
xvi. 4.*

*Acts ii. 24, 32.
iii. 15. iv. 10.
x. 40. xiii. 30.*

Acts xvii. 30.

Rom. i. 4.

When therefore this was done; and it was done if the Gospel History be true; this was a plain Seal set by God himself to our Saviour's Testimony; a Seal not possible to be counterfeited, and wherein the divine Power is so clearly and deeply engraven, that whoever looks attently upon it, must be satisfied whose Seal it is. So that to grant the Resurrection of our Saviour, and yet to doubt whether he was the Person he gave out himself to be, is to doubt of the Truth of God himself; for granting our Saviour's Resurrection, it cannot be supposed that he was an Impostor, without supposing that God himself did consent to the Imposture, and work the most evident Miracle that ever was done, on purpose to persuade Men to believe a Lye.

I shall mention at present but one Way more, whereby God was pleased to confirm our Saviour's Testimony of himself; and that was

7. By the Witness of the Holy Ghost, which Witness was given to him at his Baptism, when the Holy Ghost descended in a visible Manner as a Dove, and rested on him. It was also given to him during the whole Course of his Ministry; for the Holy Ghost not only descended, but abode upon him; and therefore St. Peter, speaking of him, says that God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with Power.

Joh. i. 32, &c.

Acts x. 38, &c.

But that Witness of the Holy Ghost which I now chiefly design, was that which was given to him after his Ascension into Heaven, and was an evident Token that all Power in Heaven and Earth was then committed to him; I mean those Gifts of the Holy Ghost which he showered down on his Apostles on the Day of Pentecost; when being met together, there came suddenly a Sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty Wind, which filled all the House where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven Tongues like as of Fire, which sat upon each of them; whereupon they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other Tongues, as the Spirit gave them Utterance.

Acts ii. 1, &c.

And this Testimony of the Holy Ghost, our Saviour promised before should be given to him; *Joh. xv. 26. When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.* And the Testimony indeed was very plain and full; for by this it clearly appeared that all his

former Miracles had been true, and had been wrought by a divine Power; when even after he had left this World he was still able to make good this Promise to his Disciples, and to empower them to do greater Works in his Name, than he himself had done while he was living upon Earth. This was a clear Demonstration that he was the beloved Son of the Father, and *was*, as St. Peter says, *exalted at God's right Hand*, when he did shed forth that wonderful Power upon his *Apostles*, of which all that then dwelt in *Jerusalem*, or had come thither from all Parts of the World to worship, were Eye and Ear-witnesses.

Acts ii. 38. And this *Testimony* of the *Holy Ghost* was given to our *Saviour*, not
viii. 17. x. 44. at that Time only, not one Day and no more, but was continued to be gi-
xix. 6. ven to him all the Time of the Apostles preaching; who were also enabled to communicate to others by laying on of Hands, the same miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost which they themselves had received; until they had finished their Ministry, and planted *Christian Churches* in all the Countries of the then known World.

Thus I have briefly mentioned the great *Evidence* that the *Gospel History* affords of the *Truth* of our *Saviour's Testimony of himself*: The *Matters of Fact* I have taken for granted, as being Parts of the *Gospel History*; the Truth of which has been, I hope, already sufficiently proved; and the Evidence it self is so clear and full, that I thought it needless to open it in more Words than I have done. For that the Testimony which God did by all these Ways give to our *Saviour*, is a rational Inducement to believe the Truth of what he said concerning himself, is what, I think, cannot be doubted by those that allow themselves any Time to consider Things.

This I am sure I may say, that if this strong Evidence that the *Gospel History* affords of our *Saviour's* divine Mission be not sufficient to prove it, there never yet has been sufficient Evidence of the Truth of any divine Revelation; I had almost said, nor ever can be, but that I know it is not for us to say, what infinite Power and Wisdom can do.

But as some *Jews* in our *Saviour's* Time said, *When Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man hath done?* So I may ask, and I believe it will be very difficult to make answer to it, *When Christ cometh* (if indeed *he* be not already come, if indeed that *Jesus* on whom we believe be not *he*) how shall we do to know him? what greater Assurance can he give us that he is the *Christ*, than *Jesus* hath given? what better Reason can we ever have to believe any Messenger that shall be sent from God, than we have to believe our *Saviour*?

For we have as much Reason, supposing the *Gospel History* to be true, to believe *him* to be sent from God, as we have to believe any Thing: We are as secure that we are not deceived in *him*, as we are that we are not deceived in the plainest Matters of Sense. For the best, the only Security that we have, that our Senses do not deceive us, and that every Thing in the World is not quite otherwise than it appears to us to be, is the *Goodness* of God; and this same Security we have, that we are not deceived in our *Saviour's* divine Mission. Nay, we are more secure of this than we are of that; because it is more plainly inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to deceive us in a Matter on which our everlasting Welfare depends, than in Matters only of this Life, which are the chief Things for which our bodily Senses are of Use to us: And if indeed we are deceived in our *Saviour*, it must be said that God *himself* has deceived us, having given us all the Reason imaginable to believe *him* to be, as he said he was, the *Son of God*.

And now having been so large in shewing the *Evidence* that there is from the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *History* of the *New Testament*, that our *Saviour himself* was a *Teacher sent from God*, I shall not need to spend much

much Time in shewing that his *Apostles* were likewise *commissioned* by God to instruct the World; and consequently that we ought also to receive all the *Doctrines* taught by *them*, whether in their *Epistles*, or in their *Discourses*, interwoven by St. *Luke* with his *History* of their *Acts*, as true and divine. For

1. There is plainly no Reason why we should not receive them as such; because they are the very *same* that our *Saviour* taught, and *no other*. Some Points of *Christian* Doctrine are indeed more largely explained and handled by the *Apostles* in their *Epistles*, than they are in those *Discourses* of our *Saviour* that are recorded by the *Evangelists*; but between the *Doctrines* taught by our *Lord himself*, and those taught by the *Apostles*, there is such a perfect *Harmony* and *Agreement*, that if we had only their own Word for it, that they spake and wrote by the Inspiration of the Spirit, we might securely believe them: For tho' one Man may, without Inspiration, say the same Thing which another before him has spoken by Inspiration; yet if the second says that he also is inspired, there can be no Hurt, tho' there may be a Mistake, in believing him; seeing whether the Man was inspired or no, it is certain that the *Doctrine* was. But,

2. If there be any *Doctrines* taught by the *Apostles*, which we do not see were taught before by our *Saviour*, I say there is however from the *History* of the *Gospel*, *Evidence enough* of their divine Mission also; so that we may very securely take upon their Credit, as true and divine, any Doctrine which they have instructed us in. For,

(1.) That they were sent by our *Saviour*, is past all Dispute, if the *Gospel History* be true; *John* xx. 21. *As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*; and again, *Matth.* xxviii. 19, 20. *Go ye and disciple all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all Things whatsoever I have commanded you.* And that he had Authority to grant them such a Commission, he shews in the Words before; *All Power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth*; *Go ye therefore and teach all Nations*, &c. And,

(2.) That they were taught by God, and enlightened by his *Holy Spirit*, is what cannot be doubted, if we believe the Power of our *Saviour*, and the Truth of the *Gospel*; for before our *Lord* went from them, *he breathed on* *Joh. xx. 22.* *them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost*: And to what Purposes the *Holy Ghost* was to be given them, he had told them before: *The Comforter which* *Joh. xiv. 26.* *is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my Name, he shall teach you all Things, and bring all Things to your Remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you*: And, *When he, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide* *Joh. xvi. 13.* *you into all Truth*. Being therefore thus taught by the Spirit of Truth, our *Saviour* might well say, as he does, *Luke* x. 16. *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* And,

(3.) Lastly; We have all the Reason in the World to receive *them* as *Messengers* from God, and to believe that all that they have taught is the Will of God, because they had the *same Attestation* of God to the Truth of their Doctrine, that our *Saviour* himself had to his. I do not mean, that God did bear them Witness *all* those Ways by which he bare Witness to our *Saviour*, for that could not be; but he bare Witness to them all those Ways by which it was proper for him to do it, and by which he had born Witness to any former Prophets.

For he bare Witness to them that they were sent by him, by the *Testi-* *Joh. xiii. 22.* *mony* of our *Saviour*, as he had done to our *Saviour* by the *Testimony* of *xx. 21.* *John*: And if the Testimony of a *Prophet* was credible concerning our *Saviour*, much more is the Testimony of the *Son of God* highly credible concerning a *Messenger* sent by him.

He bare Witness to them also by enduing them with the Gift of *Prophesy*; for *when the Spirit of Truth is come*, says our Saviour, *he will shew you Things to come.*

And lastly, He bare Witness to them, by that which is the most plain and sensible Proof of a divine Mission, *viz.* by the *Power of Miracles*, and manifold Gifts of the *Holy Ghost*. *The Lord worked with them, and confirmed their Word with Signs following*, says St. Mark: And, *With great Power*, says St. Luke, *gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. And the greater Part of the *History of the Acts of the Apostles* is spent in relating the wonderful Works that they did, by the Name of *Jesus*, and the Power of the *Holy Ghost*, in Confirmation of the Truth of their Doctrine.

But St. *Paul*, perhaps it will be said, of whose writing are most of the *Epistles*, was not one of *them*, not called by our Saviour to be an *Apostle*, as *they* were, nor so much as an Eye and Ear-witness of our Lord's Miracles and Doctrine: What Reason then have we to receive his Writings as Portions of *Holy Scripture*?

I answer; As good, tho' not in every Particular just the same, as we have to receive the Writings of the other *Apostles* as such.

For *he* was converted, and ordained to be an *Apostle*, in a more wonderful Manner than they were; as you may see in *Acts ix*.

And as our Lord himself gave Witness to *their* divine Mission, so he did also to *his*; *Acts ix 15*. *He is*, says our Lord, *a chosen Vessel unto me, to bear my Name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the Children of Israel.*

To *him* also, as well as to *them*, the Spirit fore-shewed Things to come; several Proofs of which we may observe in the *History of the Acts*, and in his *Epistles*.

And lastly, His *Speech and his Preaching* was, as theirs, in *Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power*. In *him* all the *Signs of an Apostle* were seen, no less than in them, *viz.* *Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds.*

And of *him*, with *Barnabas* in Company, it is that St. *Luke* speaks, when he says, that *the Lord gave Testimony to the Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by their Hands*. And the latter Part of the *History of the Acts*, from the tenth Chapter to the End, contains little else but an Account of St. *Paul's* Preaching, and of the *Miracles* that were done by the Power of God to confirm the Truth of *his* Doctrine: So that if we believe the *Gospel History*, we can no more doubt of *his* divine Mission and Inspiration, than we can of *theirs*; we must conclude, that if *they* were *Apostles*, so was *he*; that if *they* were *Ministers of Christ*, so was *he* too; forasmuch as in nothing *he* was behind the very chiefest *Apostles*; so that consequently we have as much Reason to believe *his* Writings to be inspired, as we have *theirs*.

And now by all that hath been said, I hope, I have fully made good the Point I was to prove; *viz.* that if the Matters of Fact recorded in the New Testament are true, *they* are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught, whether by *Christ* himself, or by his *Apostles*. For if it be true, that they were sent by God to instruct the World, and to declare the Will of God to Mankind; and that they were, is sufficiently proved by their *Credential Letters*, which we have now perused and examined; we can no more doubt the Truth of those Things which *they* as the *Messengers and Ambassadors* of God have delivered to us in his Name, than if we had heard God himself uttering the same by a Voice from Heaven. So that I cannot but persuade my self, that the Proofs which have been offered in the foregoing Discourse of the Truth of all the Doctrines that are taught in the New Testament, are sufficient to convince any rational

and considering Man of the *Truth* of any *Doctrine*, the *Falsity* whereof is not *notorious* and *self-evident*.

And therefore this, I think, is the only Thing that can with any Shew of Reason be pretended by any Person, to justify his not receiving the Gospel as a divine Revelation, *viz.* that the *Matter* of it, in some Particulars, is such as will not admit of any Proof at all; because no Arguments can make a Thing credible, which in it self is *incredible*. And such, it may be pretended, some of the *Christian Doctrines* are, which are taught in the *New Testament*; and especially the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*.

And that this *Doctrine* is clearly taught in the *New Testament*, we freely grant. But why should it be deemed *incredible*? does it imply a Contradiction? can they that except against it, or against the *Gospel Revelation* upon the Account of it, shew that it is impossible it should be true? can they demonstrate that it is impossible for an infinite and eternal Being to beget a Son in his own Likeness, *the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person*? or can they shew it to be impossible, that there should be a third Person proceeding from both these? Heb. i. 3.

No, perhaps they'll say; but that these *Three* should be *One*, as the *Scripture* teaches, *that*, they think, exceeds all the Measures of Belief; *that*, they cannot but think a manifest *Contradiction*.

But why so? do the *Christians* hold, or does the *Scripture* say, that they are *Three* and *One* in the *same Respect*? does it say that the *One God* is *three Gods*? or that those *Three* whom it speaks of as *three distinct Persons*, ascribing personal Acts to each of them, are nevertheless but *one single Person*? No; it only tells us in general, that *these Three are One*. But *how* they are *Three*, or *how* they are *One*; wherein consists their *Distinction*, and wherein their *Unity*, it says not, at least not very plainly. And I think it the safest Course in such high Matters, in *Matters* so much *too high for us, not to exercise our selves*, nor to pretend to be wise above what is written. Psal. cxxxi. 1.

If therefore there be no Contradiction in the *Doctrine* of a *Trinity in Unity*; as there is not, unless we say that God is *One* and *Three* in the *same Respect*; that is enough; that is all that needs to be said upon this Occasion. For tho' we may, as indeed we must, allow it to be an *incomprehensible Mystery*, there is no Reason to cavil at the *Gospel Revelation*, or to deny it to be a true divine Revelation upon this Account.

For we live in a World of *Mysteries*; we must believe *Mysteries* in Abundance, whether we will or no: I mean, there are some Truths so very plain even to our Reason, that we cannot doubt of them, and yet so very high and *mysterious*, that we can no more fathom them than we can the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*.

For thus, that *Matter* is *not Eternal*, we are as sure almost as we are of any Thing, for *Matter* could not exist of it self; and yet how *Matter* should be made out of *Nothing*, is as incomprehensible by us, as it is how the *One undivided Godhead* does personally subsist in the *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*.

And thus again, that God is *Eternal*, we are certain by Reason; for by God we mean the first Cause of all, and he who was first could have none before him; and yet that any Thing should exist without a *Cause* of its *Existence* is unaccountable; and if we were not sure that it must be so, we should be ready to say that it was impossible and a manifest Contradiction that it should be so.

Thus, I say, we are led by the Light of Reason only to a firm Belief of some Truths, which yet we can give no Account of by our Reason. And I think, it is very hard, that we will not receive an incomprehensible Doctrine, upon the Credit of a very plain and well attested divine Revelation, as well as we do and must do the same upon the Evidence of natural Reason.

Especially

Especially considering the *Subject* of this incomprehensible Doctrine, which is the *Essence* or *Substance* of God, who is an *infinite* Being, and so must needs be *incomprehensible* by our *finite Understandings*; by our Understandings, I say, which are so very *shallow*, that I believe I may truly say, we understand not the *Essence* or *Substance* of any Thing. For we understand not what is the *Essence* or *Substance* of *Matter* or *Body*, tho' it be a Thing that all our Senses are continually exercised about: All that we know of it, is some *Properties* or *Accidents* thereof; that it is something, but *what* we know not, that has Figure and Dimensions, that is hard, soft, fixed, fluid, or the like. And we understand no more, but rather less, what the *Essence* or *Substance* of our *Soul* is: All that we know of it is, that it is something that *thinks*, and because it thinks we know it must be *something*; and because none of those Properties which we observe in Matter have any Relation at all to *Thought*, we conclude that the *thinking Soul* is an *immaterial Something*; tho' what is *immaterial* cannot be explained by us, unless we could say what is *material*.

Wisd. ix. 16. Seeing therefore, as the wise *Hebrew* speaks, *we do hardly guess aright at Things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do find out the Things that are before us*; is it any Wonder that we cannot search out, and fully know and comprehend *the Things that are in Heaven*? If we are not able to understand even our own *Essence*, and how by an ineffable Union of Spirit with Matter, the Whole together becomes *one Man*; is it any Wonder, that by all our searching we cannot find out God, that we cannot find out the *Almighty to Perfection*?

Job xi. 7.

And what hath been thus briefly said, is, I hope, sufficient to shew that a divine Revelation cannot reasonably be excepted against or refused, only upon the Account of some mysterious and incomprehensible Doctrines that are therein contained. And if not, then I hope what was said before is enough to satisfy any considering Man, that the Gospel is a true divine Revelation.

To conclude all therefore. Having *Christ* and his *Apostles* continually preaching to us in the *Books* of the *New Testament*, Let us, as the Text says, *hear them*; let us reverence these sacred Writings as the *Oracles* of God, Jam. i. 21, 22. and receive with *Meekness* the engrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls. But let us be *Doers* of the Word, and not *Hearers* only, deceiving our own selves. For, as the *Apostle* argues, Heb. ii. 3, &c. If the Word spoken by *Angels* was stedfast, and every *Transgression* and *Disobedience* received a just *Recompence* of Reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great *Salvation*, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God also bearing them *Witness* both with *Signs* and *Wonders*, and with diverse *Miracles* and *Gifts* of the *Holy Ghost*, according to his own Will?



DISCOURSE XCIV.

New Revelations cannot reasonably be desired.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



WHEN I first began to discourse on these Words; I proposed to speak to these three Points.

I. To shew, that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament*, is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate: *They have Moses and the Prophets*; I add, they

have also *Christ* and his *Apostles*; *let them hear them.*

II. To shew, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreasonable Request* to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, to shew, that in case God should condescend to gratify Men in this unreasonable Desire, working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it; it is highly *probable*, that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance, by the preaching and *standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, would be *persuaded* by *this Means*. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets,*

nor *Christ* and his *Apostles*, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.

The first of these has been the Subject of several former Discourses; the second I design to speak to at this Time, *viz.*

II. To shew, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, as I have shewn we have, in that *standing Revelation* of God's Will, which is contained in the *Holy Scripture*, it is an *unreasonable Request* to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.*

And the *Unreasonableness* of the Request which the *rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren, *viz.* that God would be pleased to send one from the dead to preach to them; or in general, how unreasonable it is for Men now a-days to *desire*, or *look for* more Means of Conversion, or Motives to Repentance, than God has been pleased to afford us in the standing Revelation of the Gospel; will appear, if we consider these following Things.

I. That the Principles of Faith and the Motives to Repentance which we have already, being well grounded upon *Matters of Fact*, which have been once already *sufficiently* proved and attested, it is altogether *needless* that any fresh or farther Proof should be given of them; and it is what we never think reasonable to desire in other the like Cases.

That when God requires us to believe or do any Thing, and sends a special Messenger to acquaint us with his Will, he should grant to this Messenger such *Testimonials*, as are sufficient to satisfy reasonable Men, that he is no Impostor, but a Teacher sent from God, is indeed a Thing that may fairly be expected. And if God should not do thus, we should be excusable in not hearkning to such a Messenger, because we could not know whether he was a true or a false Prophet; and God does not require, neither indeed is it reasonable, that we should believe every Pretender to Revelation. And the clearest Proof of any Man's being sent from God to teach us any Thing, being a Power of doing such Miracles and mighty Works, as are manifestly above the Skill and Strength of a Man to do, it was therefore highly requisite, and what might reasonably be looked for, that God should grant such a Power as this to all those whom he has ever inspired with new Light, and commission'd to make any new Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And this he has always done.

He gave this Power to *Moses* in a large Measure, because the Matters that Men were to trust him for, were *many*, and very *considerable*.

He gave it also to *some* of the *succeeding Prophets*, but in a less Measure, because their Business, for the most Part, was only to interpret, or to press the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, which had been sufficiently proved before.

And he gave it in the largest Measure of all to our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*; because the Revelation made by them was of *Truths* very *mysterious*, some of them above the Reach and Comprehension of human Reason. It was also a Revelation in a Manner wholly *new*, even to the *Jews* themselves, and much more to the *Gentiles*: And besides, it was also a Revelation in many Points, to Appearance, *contrary* to a former divine Revelation; inasmuch as it is ordered the Abolition of many Things which had been before enjoyned by divine Authority; *viz.* all the Ritual and Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. And therefore to gain Credit to their Testimony, that they were inspired and sent by God to teach such Things, it was very requisite

requisite that they should produce more, and more plain and undeniable *Testimonials* of their divine Mission, than *Moses* himself had done. And such *Testimonials* they had, such they did produce, working more Miracles, and those, as I may say, more wonderful and miraculous, than *Moses* and all the *Prophets* together had wrought before.

But when these *Testimonials* had been *once* fairly produced and examined, and by all reasonable Men *allowed* to be true and sufficient; and when *Christ* and his *Apostles* had made and published all that Revelation which they were commissioned to make; and when to prevent all Misunderstandings of it, or Mistakes concerning it, they had committed it all to Writing; and the Men that lived in those Times, and were capable of enquiring into the Truth of it, were well assured that the *Books* said to be written by the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* were indeed *theirs*, and contained in Substance all the same Things, and no other, which they had before declared by Word of Mouth, and confirmed by Miracles: After this, I say, when the Divinity of the Revelation was thus *once*, at the first Publishing of it, so fully confirmed, there was no Need that it should be proved any more, and all other Proof thereof would have been *superfluous*; because the whole Matter, both Doctrine and Proof, being *once* faithfully recorded, and those Records well attested, there could afterwards be no reasonable Cause to call it again in Question. So that the Reason of working Miracles being then ceased, it was reasonable that the Power of working Miracles should cease too; at least till such Time as God should think fit, to make some Alteration in, or Addition to his former Revelations; which we have good Reason to think he will never do; or till he should please to undertake the Conversion of those Nations to the Christian Faith, to whom the Knowledge of the former Miracles that had been wrought for its Confirmation could not be so well communicated by credible History, as it is to us.

For, as was hinted before, *credible History* is all the Proof and Evidence that we ever think *reasonable* to require, in *other* Cases of the like Nature.

As for Instance: When a new Law is made concerning any Matter, it is requisite, according to the Custom of our Country, that it should pass both *Houses* of *Parliament*, and that the *King* should ratify and confirm it; and that afterwards it should be some Way so published and promulged, that all the Subjects that are then alive should have sufficient Assurance given them that such a Law is made. But after this Law has been *once* so passed, and ratified, and promulged, it is passed and ratified and promulged for ever; and no Man is so unreasonable as to expect that every *Parliament* that is called afterwards, should read and pass over again all the Laws that have been made before their Time; or that every *King* that succeeds to the Throne should afresh ratify and publish all the Laws that were made by all his *Predecessors*. But all the Proof that we ever require of the Authority of any ancient Law, is a true Copy of it, and a good History or Record of its being made at such a Time, by such a King, confirmed by the Tradition of all the intermediate Ages to our Time, which have allowed of its Authority, by citing it as a Law of the Land, by pleading from it, and by giving Judgment according to it.

And he who will not allow of the same Proof and Evidence of the Authority of the *Christian Institution*, so many hundred Years ago established, but would needs have new Miracles and new Revelations to confirm the former, is every whit as unreasonable as that *Criminal* would be, who being indicted upon some *ancient Statute*, should refuse to plead to his Indictment, upon Pretence that he knew not whether there was any such Law or not; it being made, if ever it was made, long before his Time, and there being

none now alive that were present at the making of it. Shew him the Law in the *Statute-Book*; why, how does he know, he'd say, but that the Printers had a Mind to put a Cheat upon the Nation, by printing a Law of their own making, as a Law made by some of our ancient Kings? Nay, shew him the *Original Record*, still he'd say, there have been Abundance of Forgeries in the World, and how does he know but that this is one? The Record, he'd own perhaps, looks like an ancient Deed, and has all the Marks of such Antiquity as it pretends to; but after all, it is *possible* it may be, and therefore he cannot be sure it is not, a Forgery; and till he is assured of this, he will not plead to an Indictment that is grounded upon it. But if the *King* and *Parliament* that now are, will be pleased to declare that this is a good Law, and if he himself may be allowed to be by when they shall declare it; or if at least two or three Witnesses that he can trust shall testify upon Oath, that they were present when it was passed into a Law, then he will allow it to be a good Law; and after that, will be content to suffer the Punishment of it, if he shall ever again be a Transgressor.

Now what Man is there, that would think this a reasonable Demand? Or what *Judge* or *Court* would ever allow of such a Plea? And yet, as unreasonable as it is, it is just the same with theirs, who, pretending to be more wise and cautious than their Neighbours, will not allow of the same Sort of Proof, though indeed much better in its Kind, of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*; but tho' we have as *authentick Histories* as any are in the World, such Histories as the greatest Adversaries of *Christianity* have not been able to say any Thing to invalidate the Truth of, which declare that *Christ* and his *Apostles* taught such and such Doctrines, and wrought such and such Miracles to confirm the Truth of their Doctrine, yet will not believe that the Doctrine of *Christianity* is true and divine, unless they may have special Messengers sent to them to declare afresh all the same Things which the *Apostles* once did; and those endued with a Power of working in their Sight and Presence the same Miracles over again, that are said to have been formerly done by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, to confirm the Testimony that they gave.

2. The *Unreasonableness* of that Request which the *rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren, *viz.* that God would make a new Revelation for their particular Conversion; or in general, the *Unreasonableness* of our now *desiring fresh Revelations, new Miracles, or Apparitions* of Men from the dead, to confirm the Truth of those Things which are already sufficiently proved to us by the *standing Revelation* of the Gospel; will farther appear, if we consider, that to *us* who live now in *Christian Countries*, other Grounds of Faith or stronger Motives to Repentance, than we have already in the standing Revelation of the Gospel, might be *inconsistent* with the *Excellency of Faith*, might *destroy the Virtue of believing*, and might be too great a *Force and Constraint* upon us, such as would in a Manner take away our *Liberty of Choice*.

For there is no Virtue at all in believing what we see; there is no Praise or Thanks at all due for doing what we are driven or forced to do; and for *us*, who have *already* abundantly sufficient Grounds to believe and embrace *Christianity*, to have fresh Miracles wrought every Day before our own Eyes, such Miracles as we could not possibly doubt the Truth of, to confirm those Doctrines which are already sufficiently confirmed, would not be to persuade us, but to *force* us to be *Christians*: So that then the State we are now in would not be, as God designed it should be, a State of *Trial*; for the *Trial of Wisdom* is, when there are some Reasons on both Sides;

Sides; and he is the wise Man who in that Case gives Judgment on that Side on which the Reasons are strongest.

But against what I have now said perhaps it may be objected, that the Evidence which we desire of the Truth of Religion is *no more* than we are told has been *already* given to some Men, particularly to those who lived in our *Saviour's* and his *Apostles* Times; and we cannot see why it would be *more* inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion *now* than it was *then*, or how it would *more* destroy *our Freedom* than it did *theirs*, or how it would be a *greater Force* upon *our Choice* than it was upon *theirs*, to have the very *same* Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* which they had.

But in answer to this, it may be considered; that as *they* then had some Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* which *we* have not, so *we* now have some Evidence thereof which *they* had not. *They* indeed saw with their own Eyes *some* of the Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of *Christianity*; but *they* had not, as *we* now have, a credible History or Record of a very *great Number* of Miracles that were wrought for that purpose. And therefore, without considering at present which of these Evidences of the Truth of the Facts upon which our Religion is grounded, is the most convincing, thus much is plain; that if *we*, who have already very good Reason to believe them upon the Credit of a well attested History, were also admitted to be Eye-witnesses of some fresh Miracles, such as we are told were then wrought, *both* these Evidences together would be stronger and more irresistible, than *either* of them *alone*: So that consequently, if *we* who have already *one* of these Evidences, were allowed to have the *other* also, *we* should have *more* Evidence in the whole than *they* had; our Choice consequently would not be so free as theirs was, it would not be so much in the Power of our Will to be *Infidels*, as it was in theirs.

True, perhaps you will say, we should indeed in that Case have more Evidence than they had, but that is not the Thing we desire; all that we could wish for, is the very *same* Evidence that they had; and upon this Condition we could be well contented to want that historical Evidence which we have and they had not; for we cannot but think, that the Evidence that *they* had is much stronger than *ours*, and that *they* had much greater Reason to be *Christians* than *we* have. For, 1. The *Apostles* of *Christ* who, as it is said, both *saw* his Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do the like themselves, had plainly *greater* Reason to believe, than even *those* had who heard from their Mouths the Testimony that they gave concerning our *Lord*, and saw the Miracles that were done by their Hands in Confirmation of their Testimony. And, 2. *They* who *saw* with their own Eyes the Miracles that the *Apostles* wrought, had more Reason to believe, than *those* had to whom they were only *reported* by Eye-witnesses; and therefore much rather than *we* have, who receive this Report only by a *History* that was written many hundred Years ago. Now this is all that we desire, *viz.* to be upon the *same Level* with those who lived in the Primitive Times, and to have *as much* Reason to be Christians as they had: And we cannot see why this Request should be thought *unreasonable*; we do not understand why there would not be then as much Freedom, and consequently as great Virtue in *our* believing upon such strong Evidence, as there was in *theirs*.

In Answer to this therefore, I shall consider distinctly the two Cases before-mentioned, and compare the same with ours.

(1.) I shall consider the Case of the *Apostles*, who both *saw* our Lord's Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do the like themselves.

And that *they* had a *surer* Ground of Faith than any since, or any besides themselves ever had, I believe must be granted: But then it is to be considered on the other Side;

1. That the *Apostles* were but *few* in Number, only *twelve* Persons; or if we should reckon into the Number, as in this respect equal to the *Apostles*, all those that were called by our Saviour *himself* to be his *Disciples*, and who were very much, tho' not so constantly, in his Company as the *Apostles* were, we read but of *seventy* of them; or if we add to these all those that were *convinced* by our Saviour's Miracles that he was the *Christ*, and that owned themselves his *Disciples* while he was upon Earth, it is probable that all these together were no more than *five hundred*; viz. those *five hundred Brethren*, to whom, when met together in *Galilee*, our Lord shewed himself alive after his Passion.

Luke x. 1.

1 Cor. xv. 6.

2. It may be also considered; that *their* Case was *extraordinary* and *peculiar*, and that this Advantage of greater Evidence, as we reckon it, which they had above all others, was no more than was *necessary* to qualify them for that *special Office*, which they, and none but they, were to be employed in; which was to bear Witness to the Men of that Generation by Word of Mouth, and to all future Ages by their written Testimony of the Doctrines and Miracles of our Saviour; for no Man is a proper Witness of any Matter of Fact, but only he who was an *Eye-witness* thereof.

3. It may be farther considered, that as *they* had a more clear and unexceptionable Evidence of the Truth of *Christianity*, than any besides ever had, so *they* had also a *greater Burthen* laid upon them, than any *Christians* since have had; and it might be no more than *necessary* that the Grounds of their Faith should be as much surer and stronger than those on which other Men's Faith is built, as their *Duty* was *larger* and *more difficult* than other Men's Duty is. For a weaker Foundation is as well able to support a low Building, placed in a Bottom, and well sheltered from Storms, as a much stronger is to bear a high built Tower, situated on the Top of an Hill, or by the Sea-shore, and continually exposed to violent Winds and Tempests.

And this was the Condition of the *Apostles* in Comparison with ours. We have indeed several Temptations to resist by the Power of our most holy Faith; but then they are only *such* Temptations as are common to Men, and for the overcoming whereof a Faith grounded only upon good *Historical Evidence* is *sufficient*; for by the Power of such a Faith a great many in all Ages have happily overcome them. But the *Apostles* had Difficulties and Temptations of *another Sort* to contend with; they *wrestled* not only against *Flesh and Blood*, but against *Principalities*, against *Powers*, against the *Rulers of the Darkness of this World*, against *spiritual Wickedness in high Places*. It was their Business to go in an untrodden Path, to break the Ice, and to make plain the Way for all that were to follow; and *our* Work, very easy in Comparison with *theirs*, is only to follow in that Way which they have made plain and smooth, to that Kingdom of Heaven into which they could not enter but *thro' manifold Tribulations*.

That the *Apostles* therefore had stronger and more convincing Proofs of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* than we have, and such as *they* could not so easily resist, as *we* may those which are afforded to us, may be granted; and yet it may be unreasonable for us to desire the same, unless we were to be put to the same Trials of our Faith that they were; which in a *Christian Country* can hardly be.

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And indeed, as desirous as we seem to be of having such Evidence of the Truth of our Religion, as we are told the *Apostles* had; I believe there are very few of us but had rather be contented with less Evidence, than have so much as the *Apostles* had with its appendant Burthen; which was to travel all the World over, even into the most rude and barbarous Countries, to plant *Christianity*; expecting wherever they came, Bonds and Afflictions, meeting every where with the most violent Opposition and roughest Usage; encountring every where the greatest Dangers, and sure at last to be made a bloody Sacrifice to the Malice and Fury of their Persecutors. How much St. Paul alone endured; and it is like the Sufferings of the other *Apostles* were not much less; you may see in 2 Cor. xi. 23, &c. and yet he was not then come to the End of his Sufferings. In Labours abundant, in Stripes above measure, in Prisons frequent, in Deaths oft: Of the Jews five times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered Shipwreck, a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep; in Journeyings often, in Perils of Waters, in Perils of Robbers, in Perils by my own Country-men, in Perils by the Heathens, in Perils in the City, in Perils in the Wilderness, in Perils in the Sea, in Perils among false Brethren: In Weariness and Painfulness, in Watchings often, in Hunger and Thirst, in Fastings often, in Cold and Nakedness. Besides those Things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches. And therefore he might well say, as he does, 1 Cor. iv. 9, &c. I think that God hath set forth us the *Apostles* last, as it were appointed to Death; for we are made a Spectacle to the World, and to Angels, and to Men; we are Fools for Christ's sake, we are weak, we are despised; even unto this very Hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling Place, and labour working with our Hands; being reviled, persecuted, defamed; we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scouring of all Things unto this Day. It was therefore plainly necessary, that a Faith which was to undergo these severe Trials, should be built upon the surest Grounds; but for us, and to enable us to overcome the World, a Faith that is founded upon less certain Evidence may be as sufficient.

(2.) The second Case before-mentioned was of those who heard with their own Ears the Testimony which the *Apostles* gave concerning our Lord, and saw with their own Eyes the wonderful Works that they did in Confirmation of their Testimony. We could wish at least, that we had such strong Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* as they had; and if we had, we see not, why there would not be as much Choice, and consequently as much Virtue in our believing, as there was in theirs.

But here it may be considered,

1. That it was the Lot but of very few even of those that lived in the *Apostles* Times, except of the Jews that dwelt in Judea, to hear the *Apostles* themselves, or to see with their own Eyes the Miracles that they wrought; and even of these there were but few, that had the Opportunity of seeing many of their mighty Works. So that all Things considered, the Evidence that we have of the Truth of our Religion, if it be not fully equal to, is very little inferior to that which they had: For it being, as has been formerly shewn, morally impossible, that the Gospel History which is now in our Hands should be forged or spurious, or corrupted and altered; what can be thought to be wanting in the Clearness of the Evidence that we have, it being given in Writing, and not by Word of Mouth, is made up by the Fulness and Abundance of it. We have in the Writings of the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, several Witnesses testifying the same Miracles, and every

every one of them witnessing *more* Miracles, than any, except those who were constant *Attendants* upon our Lord, or *Companions* of the *Apostles*. were in a Capacity to witness. But,

2. Granting it to be true, that in the *Apostles* Times those to whom the Gospel was preached, had generally clearer and stronger Evidence of the Truth of *Christianity* than we have now; yet I say, even that Evidence of Sense which they had, was not more apt or likely to convince or persuade them, than the Proof which we now have, tho' in it self it be less, is to convince and persuade us.

For when Men have already taken up an Opinion, no Matter upon what Grounds, or when by their worldly Interests they are engaged to be of such an Opinion, it cannot be expected that the same Reasons, I mean Reasons of the same Strength in themselves, should be sufficient to persuade them to alter their Opinion, which would have sufficed to have fixed and established them in their former Notions.

And this is plainly the Difference between those Times and ours. For when the Revelation of the Gospel was first made by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were most strongly prejudiced against it; each of them having been bred up in a Persuasion that their own Way of Worship was right; and the *Jews* in particular having had good Assurance that their Law given by *Moses*, to which the Doctrine of *Christianity* seem'd very opposite, had been of divine Institution. But however, when a Man has been bred up in the Belief of any Thing, and has believed it a good while, he takes it for granted that he had Reason to believe it, whether he had so or not; so that the *Prejudice* against *Christianity* was as *powerful*, tho' not altogether so just, in the *Gentiles*, whose Religion was merely fabulous, as in the *Jews*, whose Law indeed was of divine Institution.

And besides, which was an Impediment alike common both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, they could not either of them then embrace and profess the *Christian Religion* without apparently hazarding the Loss of all Things that were dear to them in this World; and how very apt a strong worldly Interest is to blind Men's Eyes, and to byass their Judgments, is what we cannot but daily observe in all other Cases.

But *our Case* now is quite otherwise; *our Prejudices* and *our Interest* are both for *Christianity*; for we sucked it in with our Mothers Milk, and we found it in the *established Religion* of the Country where we were born; for which Reasons we believed it, or at least were strongly inclined to believe it, before we knew or had heard of any other Reasons: So that to *us*, who are already *inclined* on this Side; to *us*, who to be sure, are *not prejudiced* against it; to *us*, whose *Interest* leads us to *continue* in the Religion we were first bred up in, *such Proof* as we always accept and allow of in other Cases of the like Nature, is Proof strong enough. And therefore much rather, when we have, as indeed we have, a stronger and more uncontrolled Tradition for the Truth of the *Gospel History*, than of any History in the World besides; we shall be inconsistent with our selves, if we do not allow it to be sufficient.

So that upon the whole Matter, considering the *Prejudices* both from *Education* and *Interest*, which *they* lay under who lived in those Times when the Gospel was first revealed and preached; even *their own Eye-sight* of *some* of those Miracles that were then wrought to confirm it, was not *more persuasive* than is that *good Assurance* that we now have by credible and undoubted *Records* that such Miracles were then wrought. The Proof they had, considered in it self, was indeed stronger than ours; but considering our different Circumstances, that Proof was not more apt or likely to convince them, than that which we have given us is to convince and per-

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suade us. And if we had now the very same Proof and Demonstration of the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of our *Christian Religion*, viz. The Evidence of our own Senses; this, which was but sufficient to them, might to us be such a Proof as would be, in a Manner, a *Force* upon us: Such clear Demonstration meeting with no strong Prejudice or considerable Interest on the other Side, might be enough to over-power us, so that we could not be *Infidels* if we would, and then there would be no Virtue in believing.

3. The *Unreasonableness* of desiring more Proof of the Truth of Religion than God has been pleased to afford us by the *standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, and particularly of desiring that God would be pleased to work new Miracles for our particular Satisfaction, or for the Conviction of some of our Friends that are not persuaded by the Gospel Revelation, will farther appear; if we consider the *equal Right* that *all other Men* have to desire the same, and the many *Inconveniencies* and *Absurdities* that would follow, in case *all Men* should be gratified in this Desire.

For as to the *first* of these, viz. the *equal Right* that *all other Men* have to desire the same; what Reason can *I* pretend for *my* Infidelity, which *another Man* may not also as well plead for *his*? Have not *I* as good Proof of the Truth of Religion as *my Neighbour* has? have not *I* as free Recourse to the Holy Scriptures as *he*, and the same Evidence of the Truth and divine Inspiration of them that *he* has? and are not we also in other respects *alike*? being born in the *same Country*, and having had the *same Education*, and consequently being probable to have the *same Inclinations* towards, or the *same Prejudices* against, or Aversion to the *Christian Faith*? And if so, what Reason can *I* plead for any extraordinary or peculiar Favour? For is not *he* God's Creature as well as *I*? and hath not God the same Tenderness and Regard for *him* that he hath for *me*, and consequently the same Desire of *his Welfare*, that *I* can suppose he hath of *mine*? Why then should not God grant *him* this same Request, whether in the Behalf of himself or his Friend, as well as *I* can expect he should grant it *me*? In a Word, why may not every Man desire the same as well as *I*? and why should not God grant it to *all* that desire it, as well as to *any one*?

But now if God should do this, see what *Inconveniencies* and *Absurdities* would follow thereupon?

One Sort of Men would not believe, unless they *might see Apparitions*: If *one went unto them from the dead, they would repent*. And so for their sakes the World must be filled with *Ghosts*, the dead must never be at Rest in their Graves, and the Souls in Bliss who once rejoiced in the Thought of being for ever got clear out of a troublesome World, must be content, to gratify these Men, to leave their Place in *Abraham's Bosom*, and to be deprived of the beatifical Vision, and the unspeakable Joys of Heaven, as long and as often as any of these unreasonable Men are pleased to desire it.

But another Sort of Men it may be there are, that would not like this Kind of Proof: A *transient Apparition* of a Ghost, they'd look upon perhaps as a Thing too liable to Cheat and Imposture; they'd therefore desire some more *plain* and *sensible* and *permanent* Miracles than this; some such Miracles as those were which our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* wrought; and if they could but see such, they make no Doubt but they should be convinced. And so for their sakes, and for their Conviction, half the Men that are born into the World, must be born lame or blind, that so they may be afterwards cured by Miracle, for the Satisfaction of these Men: And a great many must be possess'd with Devils, and be grievously torn and tortur'd by them, that these Men may have the Pleasure of seeing with their own

Eyes the evil Spirits cast forth; and of observing how much more calm and sober the Men are after the Devil is gone out, than they were before.

But even these Miracles, it is like, would not satisfy all; but some it may be, would be apt to suspect, that there might be some Trick or Collusion in them, and that what they saw, was done only by a *Confederacy* between the *Physician* and the *Patient*, to amuse and deceive the Beholders; and therefore, what they, it may be, would desire for their particular Satisfaction, would be, to see a dead Man raised to Life again after he had been dead several Days, and began to stink; and such a Miracle as this, they are sure, would convince them. And so for their sakes a great many Men must dye two or three Times over, or much oftner; because perhaps every Time before they have been dead a Week, some other Person that was not present before, may have a Desire to see with his own Eyes the same Experiment tried over again.

But even this Miracle also would perhaps be excepted against by some, and nothing less would satisfy them than the very *same* Evidence which the *Apostles* themselves had, who conversed with our *Saviour* for some Years together, and *heard* all his wise *Discourses*, and *saw* all his *Miracles* and mighty Works, and were *present* with him when he expired on the Cross, and *assisted* at the laying his dead Body in the Sepulchre, and within three Days after *saw* him alive again, *touched* and *handled* him, *eat* and *drank* with him; and after they had thus, several Times, by the Space of forty Days, been by *many infallible Proofs* assured of the Reality of his Resurrection, *saw* him visibly taken up in his Body into Heaven.

They that had this, they grant, had very good Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*; and had they but been of this happy Number, they are sure they should not only have believed, but also willingly have suffered as much as the *Apostles* themselves did, for bearing their Testimony to the Truth of those Things which they had seen and heard.

And what now must be done for the Satisfaction of these Men? For *these* have as *much Right* to a full Satisfaction as any *others*; and by the same *Reason* that *others* do expect to be gratified in what they desire, *these* may may do so too.

And therefore in order to their Satisfaction, it is necessary that our *Saviour* should be born into the World in every *Age* of it, or indeed much oftner; and that in every *Country* at least, if not in every *Town* and *Village*, he should *live* and *preach* and *do Miracles*, and be *crucified* and *rise again*; for that these Things have been once done, they cannot, they say, believe only upon the *Testimony* of other Men who say they did see them: And therefore by the same *Reason*, if they themselves should see them, other Men that should come after, or live in other *Countries*, would have as little Cause to believe their Testimony.

So that for the full Satisfaction of all such doubting Men as these, our *Saviour* must have suffered *often* since the Beginning of the World, and must continue to do so very *frequently*, as long as the World shall last, because with some Men nothing but seeing is believing.

But that this should be, is what I presume none besides themselves can think it *reasonable*, either for *Men* to *ask*, or for *God* to *grant*.

4. Lastly, the *Unreasonableness* of *desiring* any *farther* or *additional Proof* of the Truth of Religion, besides what is already afforded us in the *standing Revelation* of the *Holy Scripture*, will farther appear; by considering our *own Interest* in being convinced and persuaded of the Truth of Religion by such Arguments and Motives as are in themselves *sufficient* for that Purpose, although they be not so very strong and forcible as we could wish they were.

And this Argument I shall handle in the Way of *Reproof*, and a just and seasonable *Reproof* I think it, to such bold and presuming Persons as I have been now speaking of, who will needs stand upon their Terms with Almighty God, and will not be persuaded to believe and repent, but just by such *Reasons* and such *Motives* as they themselves shall be pleased to require. Tell not us, say they, of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and of Things that were done a great while ago, we know not when; we will have fresh Revelations, and new Miracles, or Messengers from the dead, or else we will not believe and repent; that we are resolved on.

Very well, then I say, you may, if you will, continue still in your Unbelief and Impenitence. Nevertheless I would advise you, before you fully determine to persist in this Resolution, to take a little Time to consider seriously, *whose Interest* and *Concern* it is, either that you should believe, or that you should not believe; consider *who* it is that will be a *Gainer* or a *Sufferer*, either by the *one*, or by the *other*. For let me tell you, if there be really a Heaven and a Hell, and a Judgment, and a Life to come, it is not your not believing them that will make them not to be: And if these Things are true, it is your *own Life* and *Soul* that are at Stake; and if you are resolv'd to lose both unless you may be saved *your own Way*, you your selves will be the greatest, nay you your selves will be the only Sufferers.

And this is a Consideration that affects the Case very much, and makes it very unreasonable to insist upon having such Satisfaction in this Case, as in some other Cases might, not so very unreasonably, be desired.

For if any Man tells me a Story which it is for *his Interest* I should believe, it is *his Concern* to give me such Assurance of it as I shall require, even altho' less than I require would be in all Reason sufficient; and therefore if I will not believe one or two Witnesses, tho' it may be unreasonable in me not to believe them, yet it is *his Business*, and what it *behoves him* to do, to produce, if it be possible, ten or twenty Witnesses, or as many more as I shall ask for; and if one Sort of Proof, tho' in it self it be ever so good, will not satisfy me, it is *his Part*, and what *he* ought in Reason to do, if he be able, to bring other Proofs of it; and so to go on multiplying his Witnesses and his Proofs, until such Time as I shall declare my self fully satisfied: And the Reason is, because the Loss or Inconvenience will be *his*, and *only his*, in Case he cannot convince me of the Truth of his Relation.

But now on the other Side, if the Story which he tells me be true, and it be for *my Interest* and *Advantage* only, *not* at all for *his*, that I should believe it to be true; if, I say, *he* will be neither a *Gainer* nor a *Losser*; whether I believe his Report, or whether I do not believe it; then, if he gives me such Evidence of the Truth of it, as is *sufficient* to convince a *Man of Reason*, he has done *enough*; he has done all that belonged to him as a Friend to do. And if after this, I make it my Business to *cavil* at and to *except* against his Evidence, and go about to *prescribe* to him what Sort of Proof he should give me of the Truth of what he relates; declaring withal, that less or other Proof than just that which I require shall never satisfy me; he may justly reject my Suit as unreasonable, and condemn me for a Fool, that will not see *my own Interest*, nor know when a Friend has done enough.

And this is exactly our Case.

God has sent his *Son* to us with the Promise of eternal Life, and has given us *sufficient Assurance* of his divine Mission, and thereby of the Truth of that Revelation which he made. Now if we will believe this, well and good, the *Profit* will be all *our own*; we shall save our *own*

Souls

Souls alive: But God will receive no Advantage to himself by our believing; his perfect Happiness being not capable of any Increase. But if we will not believe this Testimony that God has given of his *Son*, if we except against his Witnesses, and cavil at his Evidence, and will not believe but just upon that very Sort of Proof which we our selves are pleased to pitch upon; why then, we may even take our own Course, we may be Unbelievers still; but it is *we* only that shall suffer by our Unbelief, the infinite and essential Happiness of God being as little capable of Diminution as of Advancement. And as, if we believe and repent, God will be glorified in our Salvation, so, if we will not believe and repent, he will be no less glorified in our Destruction.

Seeing therefore, whether you believe, or whether you do not believe, God will be neither a Gainer nor a Loser, but the *Profit* or the *Damage* will be *all* your *own*; it is plainly your *Interest* as well as your *Duty*; to give Credit to such Evidence, as really and in it self is credible; and such, I hope I have already shewn that to be which is given us of the Truth of *Christianity*; and not to set your selves to cavil at it, and to study Exceptions to it; not to take upon you to prescribe to God Almighty, and boldly to tell him what Sort of Evidence he must give you, or else you will not be satisfied.

Do not then stand in your own Light; do not bring Destruction upon your selves when you may avoid it; but give Ear to what *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, speak to you in the *Holy Scriptures*; and hear them without Prejudice, with a Mind ready to hearken to Reason, and resolved to be persuaded by it: And then what they will say to you will be abundantly *sufficient* to satisfy you; for they say as much in this Case, or more, as by the common Voice and Reason of all Mankind is judged to be sufficient in all other Cases of the like Nature.

But if you are resolved not to be persuaded, so long as there is any Possibility of Doubt or Scruple left; if you are resolved not to believe, unless you may have just that very Evidence given you that you your selves are pleased to require; if you will boldly and arrogantly take upon you to teach God, as if he knew it not, what Evidence he ought to give Men of the Truth of Religion, and are resolved to find or make Exceptions against any other: Look you to it, for if God has done enough already, he is under no Manner of Obligation to do more. More, did I say? Nay, he needed not to have done so much; for it was mere Grace and Favour in God, that he has done so much as he has done; that he has made us any Promises at all, and given us any Assurance of them. And therefore for what he has done we ought to be thankful, and not to find Fault with him that he has done no more. Such Impudence and Sauciness as this, for I can call it by no better a Name, from a *Man* to his *Maker*, from a *mean inconsiderable Creature*, to the *great Lord of Heaven and Earth*, is, I am sure, no proper Qualification to merit extraordinary and peculiar Favours. For as our *Saviour* says, to some in a like Case, to some who formerly made the like unreasonable Demand that you now do: It is *an evil and adulterous Generation that seeketh after a Sign, and therefore there shall no Sign be given. Verily I say unto you, there shall no Sign be given to this Generation.*

Matt. xii. 39.
Mark viii. 12.

Let us then be *content* with that Assurance which God has given us of the Truth of Religion; for greater than this we shall not have, until it be too late. Let us *thankfully accept of*, and *readily comply* with this, and not expect or wait for more; for God will not gratify us in our unreasonable Desire. He is resolved to deal with us as with Men, to incline, not to determine our Choice; to persuade, not to force us to be happy. And

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having

having already given us the *standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, which is *sufficient* both to instruct and convince us, and having prov'd the Truth of this *sufficiently* to us, he will not be making new Revelations, or sending more Prophets divinely inspir'd, or working fresh Miracles every Day. He has done enough already to satisfy our sober Judgments; and he will not do every Thing that we can think of, to gratify our wild and extravagant Fancies.

And there is the less Reason that he should do so, because if the ordinary Means which he uses for our Conversion do not succeed, the Fault lies wholly in us; and therefore it is highly probable, so certain that it needs not be tried, that any other Means proper for God to use to reclaim us, would be alike unsuccessful. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the Dead.*

This is the *last Reply* that *Abraham* makes to the *rich Man's* Request; and it was the third of those three Points which I at first propounded to speak to; but which I must reserve for the Subject of my next Discourse.



DISCOURSE XCV.

New Revelations would probably be
unsuccessful.

LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.



IN discoursing on these Words, I have already done these two Things.

I. I have shewn that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. This is intimated in the first Verse of the Text; *They have Moses and the Prophets, (Christ and his Apostles,) let them hear them.* And,

II. I have likewise shewn, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is *unreasonable* to desire more. This was what the *rich Man* had done at the twenty seventh and twenty eighth Verses, and which he still continues to do in the second Verse of the Text, even after *Abraham* had told him that the *standing Revelation* of God's Will in the Holy Scripture was *sufficient*; *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.*

He says it positively, *they will repent*: He speaks it as a Thing that no Doubt could be made of. In Answer to which, therefore, *Abraham* tells him, in the last Verse of the Text, that that which he thought so very cer-
tain,

tain, was not so much as probable: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the Dead.*

And this was the third Point I propounded to speak to, in discoursing on these Words, *viz.*

III. To shew, that in Case God should condescend to gratify Men in this unreasonable Desire, working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it, it is highly probable, that very few, or none, of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the preaching and standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by this Means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, I add, nor Christ and his Apostles, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the Dead.*

And the Truth of this will, I suppose, sufficiently appear, if these following Things be considered;

1. That we cannot have *better* or *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life, than are already offered in the *Holy Scripture* to persuade us.
2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion, is such as cannot be *fairly* excepted against; and that there is no Proof thereof that could be offered, but what is liable to *Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*.
3. That if God should gratify all Men in this Request, the *Abundance* and *Commonness* of the Miracles that must then be wrought, would go near to destroy the Efficacy and Persuasiveness thereof.

And lastly, That it is *Matter of Fact* and *Experience*, that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkened to, nor been convinced by, a *standing Revelation* of God's Will.

1. I say, we cannot possibly have, as to the *Matter* of them, *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a holy Life, than those which are already offered in the *holy Scripture* to persuade us. For there we have *Life and Death set before us, Blessing and Cursing*: On one hand, *the Promise of this Life, and of that which is to come*; and on the other hand, all the Evils that we can justly dread; the Wrath of him who is a *consuming Fire*; who often punishes Transgressors with remarkable Judgments in this Life, and has threatned to all impenitent Sinners, eternal Torments in the next.

Now if a new Revelation was to be made, and we our selves were to contrive the *Matter* of it, what stronger Motives than these could we think of? Or if one should come from the Dead to preach to us, if *Lazarus* were sent on purpose to persuade us, what could he offer more towards it? Could he give us Assurance of any thing better or more desirable than of God's Readiness to forgive us, upon our Repentance; and of compleat and perfect Happiness both of Body and Soul to all Eternity, if we do repent? Or could he threaten any thing more like to deter us from Sin, than intolerable and everlasting Misery? if not, to what Purpose should he be sent to us? or indeed to what Purpose should there be any *new Revelation* at all? For these Things are already promised and threatned clearly enough in the *holy Scripture*; *Life and Immortality* are already fully brought to Light by the Gospel; and if the Hope of Eternal Life and Happiness, and if the Dread of everlasting and intolerable Torments will not persuade us, nothing certainly will or can persuade us.

All that, I think, could in any new Revelation be added to that Encouragement that is already given us in Scripture to Virtue and Godliness, or to that Discouragement that is therein given us to Vice and Wickedness, would be an Assurance that there should be always as remarkable a *Difference* made,

made, by the *Providence* of God, between good and bad Men, in *this World*, as we are told in Scripture there will be, by his *righteous Judgment* in *that* which is to *come*. And a good Assurance given us of this by some new Revelation, confirmed by our own constant Observation that it was always well with the Righteous, and ill with the Wicked in this World, we may think perhaps would do much more towards the Reformation of Mankind, than only those Promises and Threatnings of future Happiness or Misery, that we meet with in the Scripture have done, or are ever like to do.

And this indeed might be: But then it is to be considered, that a new Revelation to this Effect would be inconsistent with the Nature of Religion, and would frustrate the Design of God in sending us into this World, which was to prove and try us; to see whether we love the *Lord* with all our Heart; whether we can believe him for those Things which we do not see; and whether we are so wise as to prefer a greater future Good, before a less that is present, a blessed and glorious Immortality after this Life, before the Pleasures of Sin which are but for a Season. For if the Reward of Virtue, and the Punishment of Vice, were always visible and present, there would be no Room left for *Faith* in God, which is a firm Belief of the Truth of his Promises and Threatnings, though we do not see a present Performance of them. *Faith*, as the *Apostle* defines it, *is the Substance*, or * confident Expectation of Things hoped for; *the Evidence*, or † Conviction of Things not seen. And if all the good Things, both of this Life and of the next, were the certain Portion of Virtue, and all the evil Things that can be suffered, both in this World and in the other, were the certain and never-failing Consequence of Sin, there would be no Room left for a virtuous and wise Choice; nay indeed, there would be hardly Matter for Choice at all: For it cannot be conceived, that a Creature that has Understanding, and a Power of chusing and refusing, should knowingly chuse all Misery, rather than all Happiness. Such a Revelation as this being therefore so evidently inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion, and with the Design of God in sending us into this World, cannot be expected. And I say that, baiting this, there can be nothing added to the *Matter* of the Scripture Revelation. From whence therefore it plainly follows, that such as are not persuaded by the Gospel Motives, to Repentance, are not capable of being persuaded by any such Motives, as, consistently with the Nature of Faith, and Religion, and Virtue, could be offered to them; and it cannot be supposed that any true divine Revelation should ever offer any Motives to persuade us, that are not such.

But it may be said, perhaps, that though better or stronger Motives to Repentance cannot be offered by any new Revelation, than are offered already in holy Scripture, yet we might by a new Revelation, have *better Assurance* given us of the Truth of the Gospel Motives; and that if we had, it is very like they would be then more prevailing than they now are.

And this likewise I believe must be granted. But then it is to be considered, that the Nature of Faith and Religion, and of that State of Trial which we are now in, requires that there should be a reasonable Boundary set to the Clearness of that Evidence that is given to Men, of the Truth of those Motives whereby they are to be persuaded, as well as to the Force and Strength of the Motives themselves: Because, as I noted in my last Discourse, such very clear and strong Evidence of the Truth of Religion as leaves no Room for a Possibility of Doubting, would destroy our Freedom of Choice, and, with it, the Virtue and Excellency of Believing; for it is not Faith to believe what we see and feel, and it is no Commendation to a Man to be good and virtuous, if his Virtue be not the Fruit of a wise Judgment and a free Choice; which it would not be, if his Judgment was over-born by ir-

refragable

Heb. xi. 1.

* ὥστε.

Ham. in loc.

† Ἐκείνη.

refragable Demonstration. And if that farther Proof and Evidence that is desired of the Truth of Religion, be no other than such as will leave us a Freedom of Choice, and a Possibility of Doubting; then I say, it is not likely, it should be more convincing to us, than that which we have already in the standing Revelation of holy Scripture. For it may be considered farther, in the second Place;

2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion, is such as cannot *fairly* be *excepted against*; and that there is no Proof thereof that could be given us, unless it be such as is not resistible, and consequently such as is not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial; but what is *liable to foolish Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*: So that consequently the same *Temper* and *Disposition* of Mind, and the same *Unwillingness* to believe, which now dispose Men to *Infidelity*, and prompt them to make Exceptions to the present Grounds of the *Christian Faith*, would work the same Effect, in case other Proof and Evidence were given of the Truth of it.

I say, *first*, That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, is such as cannot *fairly* be *excepted against*.

To shew this has been the Design of several former Discourses: And therefore to what has been said I shall only add, that if the Exceptions that are made to the Evidence already given us of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* were fair and reasonable, they would be allowed by Mankind to be so in other Cases of the like Nature; which yet they are not. Nay, if they who make these Exceptions in the Case of Religion, did themselves think that they were just and reasonable, they ought to make the same in all other Cases that are equally liable to the same Exceptions; and in all other such Cases, they ought to live and act as if they had the same Doubts and Scruples upon them, which they say they have in the Case of Religion. But we see the quite contrary every Day we live.

For that same *Infidel* who will not allow of the *Testimony* which was given to our *Saviour* by his *Apostles*, though they gave the best Assurance that it was possible for Men to give, both of their Knowledge of what they testified, and of their Honesty in relating it; yet readily allows, that in all other Cases the *Testimony* of *two* or *three* credible Witnesses should be received, without any collateral Evidence of the Truth of their Testimony; and thinks it reasonable that all Disputes and Controversies among Men concerning their Civil Rights, their Estates, nay, and their Lives too, should be thereby determined. And he that questions whether the *Books* of the *New Testament* were *written* by the *reputed Authors*, yet makes no Question but that *other Books*, of as ancient or older Date, and of the Authority of which there is not half so much traditional Evidence, were written by those *Persons* to whom they are *ascribed*; and he would think those very unreasonable Men, who when he was arguing any Point of Learning with them upon the Authority of *Virgil*, or *Cicero*, or *Seneca*, should refuse to admit his Argument, till he had first undeniably and demonstratively proved that the *Aeneids* were written by *Virgil*, or that the other Pieces that have been allowed in all Ages ever since to have been written by *Cicero* or *Seneca*, were not falsely fathered upon those Authors. The *Infidel* who doubts of the Truth of the *Gospel History*, at the same Time has no Doubt at all of the Truth of *other Histories*, as ancient, and much more possible to be false; and of the Truth of which there is not the hundredth Part of that Evidence that there is of the Truth of this. And he that pretends to be uncertain, whether there ever was such a Man as *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, and whether he said and did the Things recorded of him by the *Evangelists*; and whether by the preaching of his *Apostles* he did spread his *spiritual Empire* over all the Countries of

the World; an Empire which is still kept up in most of the Countries over which it was first extended, and of which there are evident *Marks* and *Memorials* still remaining, even in those Countries that have since revolted from it: He, I say, that doubts of these Things, altho' witnessed by the *Writings* of those who were *Eye-witnesses* thereof, yet makes no Doubt but that there was such a Man as *Alexander the Great*, who lived above three hundred Years before, and that he translated the Empire of the World from *Persia* to *Greece*; and he also gives full Credit to the other Things which he finds related of him, by *Curtius*, *Plutarch* and *Arrian*, altho' none of these Authors were *Eye-witnesses* of his Wars and Greatness, but either copied what they wrote from former Histories, or took it up from Report; and although there are perhaps no *Remains* of that Empire now left in the World. And if he was but as sure of a good Estate, as that the History of *Alexander's* Expedition and Conquests is in the main a true History, he would not, I believe, give the hundredth Part of its Value to ascertain his Title to it.

Those therefore are manifestly unreasonable Exceptions to the Proofs of *Christianity*, which no Man will allow, which even those that make them in this Case do not think reasonable to make, in other Cases of the like Nature: So that it is not at all likely, that any Person, that is not convinced by these Proofs, should be convinced if more were given.

For, as I farther noted, there is no *Proof* that could be given us of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, unless it be such as is not resistible, and consequently not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial, but what is *liable* to *foolish Cavils*, and *unreasonable Exceptions*.

This, I think, is so self-evident, that nothing plainer or more undeniable can be said to prove it. For though the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion were as plain as *Demonstrations* in the *Mathematicks*, yet even these may be cavilled at, by such as will allow of no *Postulata*, nor grant the Truth of the clearest *Axioms*. Nay, there have been *Scepticks* in the plainest *Matters of Sense*, and some have denied *Motion*, at the same Time that their own Tongues were moving to deny it.

Not that I think the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion is as clear as any Proposition in *Euclid*, or as the shining of the Sun at Noon, for that cannot be; and I have already given Reasons why, if it might, it should not be so; but it is as clear as such a Matter is capable to be. And I dare be bold to say, that there is no other Proof of Religion fit to be offered, or reasonably to be desired, to which a *Sceptick* might not make as just and plausible Exceptions, as he can to the standing Proofs of *Christianity*. For one single *Miracle* done in his own Presence would be nothing near so convincing as the many *Miracles* wrought by *Christ* and his *Apostles* were, of some or other of which there were more than ten thousand Witnesses; and if he can suppose that so many were deceived, in plain Matters of Sense, he may rather suppose that he, a single Man, may be imposed upon. And an *Apparition* of a deceased Friend would be a Matter wherein any one Man might be more probably cheated, or be more easily persuaded that he was cheated, than the *Apostles* could be in the *Resurrection* of our Lord, when he was seen by them very frequently, and sometimes by a great Company of them met together, by the Space of forty Days. And a single *Miracle* that is over as soon as done, could not make such a deep and lasting Impression upon a Man's Mind, as that constant Power of working Miracles, and especially the Gift of *Tongues*, which lasted a whole Life, must needs do upon the *Apostles*, and those that lived in their Time, who were either Partakers of these Gifts themselves, or constant Witnesses thereof in others.

In short, whatever Miracles we can desire may be wrought for our Conviction, either they must be *seen* by us with our *own Eyes*, or else they must be received by *Testimony* from others.

And though they should be *seen* by us with our *own Eyes*, yet so long as it is against our Inclination, or inconsistent with that Love which we bear to the World, or to our Sins, to believe that they are true Miracles, we should easily be apt to fancy that they were only *melancholy Delusions*, or *Tricks* put upon us by designing Men, which our first Fright or Amazement hindered us from discovering the Fraud of; and so they would probably have no Effect at all upon us, longer than till our Fright or Amazement was well worn off.

But if we should only have an Account of them by *Testimony* from others, they would be yet less likely to persuade us; because there can be no Testimony concerning any such Matter of Fact, more clear and unexceptionable, than that which we have already, of the Truth of our *Saviour's* and his *Apostles* Miracles; so that if we believe not this, we should hardlier believe any other Testimony, because we can scarcely have so good Assurance of any Man's Truth, as we have of the Sincerity and Veracity of all those who are the present Witnesses to our Religion; and we can hardly be surer that we hear any Man whom we know speaking to us, than we are that we hear the *Apostles* speaking to us, in the *Books* of the *New Testament*.

And therefore I think it plainly follows, as I farther noted, that the same *Temper* and *Disposition of Mind*, and the same *Unwillingness* to believe the Truths of the Gospel, which now dispose Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to study and make Exceptions to the Proofs already given us of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect, if other Proof and Evidence were given of it, and that Men would then quickly make as good Exceptions to that, as they do now to these. For from what has been said, I think it is plain, that if Men do not see the Truth, when it is placed in so clear a Light as it is in already, the Reason must be, because they wilfully shut their Eyes; or else are so blinded by a Love of this World, or of their sinful Lusts, that if the Light were ten times brighter than it is, they would see no more than they do now. And it would be to as little Purpose, in order to the Conversion of such perverse and obstinate Men, to add any more or stronger Proofs of the Truth of Religion, as it would be to light up Abundance of Torches to a Man that is quite blind.

For this is indeed the true Cause why Men will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, why they will not believe *Christ* and his *Apostles*, testifying the Certainty of a future State, and other Truths of Religion; it is not, I say, because there is any just Exception to their Testimony, but because they do not like the Matter of it, and so are resolved not to believe. They love their Sins so well, that they can upon no Account be persuaded to part with them; and being so resolved, it is an easy Thing to cavil at any Motives or Arguments that are urged to persuade them to it: Seeing they will not see, and hearing they will not hear nor understand; and to Men so obstinately resolved against Conviction, no Proof can be convincing enough.

And this is the sad Effect of Love to Sin; it vitiates the Judgments of Men, so that they cannot distinguish between Things that differ most vastly; it darkens their Understanding, so that the plainest Proposition, or the clearest Consequence in the World, if it be against the Interest of Sin, seems dark and obscure to them; and it renders their Minds so averse to Religion, that they cannot, with any Patience, so much as hear the Arguments that are offered to prove it: And be a Reason ever so good, it is not to be hoped it should be convincing to a Man who will not hear it, or who will not allow himself calmly to consider it.

From all that hath been said, therefore, upon this Head, it plainly appears; that the proper Cure of Infidelity, is not the Addition of more Proof of the Truth of Religion, but a right Preparation and Disposition of Mind to consider well the Proof thereof that is offered; which is sufficient to convince and persuade all those that have a Love of Truth, and a Will disposed to Virtue. The Causes of Infidelity must be first removed, and then the Cure of it will be easy, by those Means which God has provided, and directed us to use, and there will be no Need of his working Miracles for Men's Conviction; but till the Causes of it are removed, it is hardly to be cured, even by a Miracle.

But it will be said perhaps, that though fresh Revelations, and new Miracles, might not be sufficient to convince *all*, they might however convince *some*; because there are several Degrees in the Perverseness and Obstinacy of Men. Some indeed there may be, whom no such Proof of Religion as is fit to be given us in this State of Trial, would persuade, whose Case therefore must be given over as desperate: But then there are others, who, Acts xxvi. 28. as King Agrippa was, are *almost persuaded to be Christians*, and when the Scales are already near even, a small Weight put into the lightest will make it over-balance the other; so that it may reasonably be hoped, that some small Addition to the Proof of Religion, no more than might be made to it without destroying either our Freedom of Choice, or the Excellency of Faith and Virtue, would prevail with these *half Christians*.

And perhaps it might; but God is wiser than we are, and knows better than we what is fit for him to do towards the Conversion of Men: We ought therefore to conclude, that he does all that is fit to be done, tho' we do not see but that he might do more.

But this, it may be, will not be taken for an Answer, but will rather be thought a Way of avoiding a Difficulty too hard to be accounted for. And therefore I say farther; and it was the third Thing which I proposed to be considered,

3. That if God should gratify all Men in this Request, working new Miracles every Day for the Conviction of particular Persons; and, as I have formerly noted, there is no Reason in the World, why any one Man should be gratified in this Request rather than others, when they have all equal Reason and equal Right to desire it; should God, I say, gratify all Men in this Request, the *Abundance* of the *Miracles* that must then be wrought, would be so far from adding to the Proof of *Christianity*, that it would rather *lessen* or *weaken* that Proof of it which we have already; because Miracles, the properest Proof of a publick divine Revelation, would not be then so convincing as they are now.

For that which most of all affects Men in a Miracle, is the *Unusualness* of it; because it is such a Thing as was never, or but rarely before, ever seen or heard of: As the *blind Man* that had been cured by our *Saviour* well observes, *Joh. ix. 32. Since the Beginning of the World it hath not been heard, that any Man hath opened the Eyes of one that was born blind.* Had it been a common Thing, it would have been no Miracle; I mean it would not have appeared so, it would not have been thought so by Men. For that which makes Men wonder even at a true Miracle, is not so much because it is such an Operation as they cannot give a fair Account of by natural Causes; for this they cannot do, (I am confident I may say, they have not yet done it) of many of the Works and Productions of Nature: But they therefore conclude such a Thing not to be a natural Operation, because it is not usual, because it is such a Thing as was never before known to be done. And if the same Thing, which now, for this Reason, we should account a Miracle, was done every Day, the *Virtuosi* would presently set themselves to
+ invent,

invent, and would quickly fancy they had found out some natural Solution of it: And I believe there are not many Miracles that have been done, which they might not, after long Study, be able to give as clear and probable an Account of by natural Causes, as they have done of *Gravity*, of *Fire*, of the *Loadstone*, of *Vision*, of the *Production of Vegetables*, of the *Generation of Animals*, and of many other Things, which yet are doubtless the Works and Effects of natural Causes.

So that, I say, the most probable Consequence of having Miracles so very common as they must be, if they were wrought for the Conviction of particular Men, would be this, that they would cease to serve for that Purpose for which Miracles were designed; because being common, they would be disregarded, or would quickly be looked upon to be the Effect of natural Causes only. There would not be wanting some that would offer to give an Account how they were done; and all those would be despised by the Scorners of Religion, as too much addicted to Superstition, who rather than attribute the greatest Miracle to a supernatural Power, would not acquiesce in that Solution, how silly soever, that was given of it by mere *Matter* and *Motion*.

And in particular, I question not, but that if it was a common Thing for dead Men, after they had lain in their Graves for some Time, to come forth again, and shew themselves alive to their Friends, this wonderful Effect would be attributed by a great many to some *Vital Principle* in the Body, which only slept for a while, as it does in Corn or other Seeds, while they are kept dry and above Ground, but afterwards, when the Body was buried a while, was excited by some natural Virtue that was in the Earth to exert it self, and so by its *Plastick Power* formed the Body into the same Shape it was in before.

This, I say, would in all Probability be the Effect that the greatest Miracles would have in the World, if they were very common: They would only serve to set the *Philosophers* Wits to Work, to invent *new Forms* of *Matter*, and *new Laws* of *Motion*, by which to solve them; and any Solution of them, though ever so improbable, though only by *Occult Qualities*, would serve Turn, and be thought better than to recur to an Almighty Power. The Consequence of which would be, that this which we desire as an additional Proof of Christianity, would in effect *destroy* one of the best Proofs of it that we have already. But,

4. Lastly, If it be supposed that Miracles would still be thought Miracles, notwithstanding their Commonness, yet *Abraham* might well deliver it as a general Truth, to which there are none or very few Exceptions; that he who is not wrought upon by a standing Revelation of God's Will, would not be persuaded by an extraordinary Message, or a new Miracle; because it is *Matter of Fact* and *Experience*, that this last Method has been generally unsuccessful, upon those who have not hearkned to, nor been convinced by a standing Revelation.

For this was the very Case of the *Jews* in our *Saviour's* Time; the Parable was literally fulfilled in them. For as they would not believe *Moses* and the *Prophets*, testifying of our *Saviour*, so neither did they any more believe our *Saviour* himself, when he came down to them from Heaven, in the *Power* of God: And as they did not believe him while he *lived* amongst them, and went about preaching and doing Miracles, so neither did they believe him a Jot more after he *came again* to them from the *Dead*. Never were there such Signs and Miracles wrought for Men's Conviction, and yet never was there such a Number of obstinate Infidels as then. Very few, even of those who were Eye-witnesses of our *Saviour's* Miracles, were the better for them; but many were a great deal worse, wilfully blaspheming

that *Spirit* by which he wrought them, and attributing those Operations to the Help of the *Devil*, which they were convinced in their own Judgments were done by the *Power* of God. *The opening the Eyes of the Blind*, did but make those that saw the Miracle more *blind* than they were before; and when once a *dead Lazarus* did come forth out of his Grave, and appear to them, which was the very Thing that the *rich Man* here desires, in the Behalf of his Brethren, as being, in his Judgment, the most powerful, and so like to be the most effectual Method to reclaim them; when, I say, this was done by our *Saviour*, in the Presence of a great Number, so that the Truth of the Miracle could not be doubted, and was not denied by any of them; all the Effect that it had upon those obstinate and incredulous Men, was only that it made them enter presently, sooner perhaps than otherwise they would have done, into a close *Consultation* to put to Death both *Jesus* and *Lazarus* too.

Some Examples indeed, it must be granted, there are on the other Side; for we are told, in *Acts* ii. 41. of a great Number, *about three thousand*, that believed upon the first Preaching of *St. Peter*, and the Sight of that great Miracle, the *Gift of Tongues*, wherewith the *Apostles* were endued.

But then it may be considered, that it was not the Miracle that convinced them; I mean, not that alone; for many that were then present, and heard the *Apostles* speaking with *Tongues*, were so far from being persuaded thereby, that they most falsely blasphemed that, as they had done all our *Saviour's* Miracles before, attributing the Fruit of that most evident Power of the *Holy Ghost* to *new Wine*. And it may be farther noted, that those who were persuaded by it, were such as before they saw the Miracle were in a good Disposition to embrace that pure Religion that is taught in the Gospel, or else that Miracle would not have persuaded them; for the Persons convinced thereby were not of the *Pharisees* or *unbelieving Jews* that had rejected our *Saviour* before; but they were *devout Persons*, *Jews* or *Profelytes*, who had come at that Feast of *Pentecost*, from other Parts of the World to *Jerusalem*, to worship, and who had probably never heard of our *Saviour* before, more than by uncertain Report; but being well read in *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and giving good Heed to them, were converted, more by the manifest Accomplishment of all the ancient Prophecies concerning the *Messias*, in the Person of our *Saviour*, than by the Sight of that great Miracle.

This therefore being Matter of Fact and Experience, what has been done and come to pass already; that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon such as have not regarded a standing Revelation of God's Will, we may reasonably infer, that it is highly probably, if not certain, that the same Experiment tried over again would have no better Success.

Acts xiii. 48.
* Τέλειον μένος εἰς
ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

The Sum of all therefore is this. Such as are, as *St. Luke* says they were who were converted by the Preaching and Miracles of the *Apostles*, * *pre-disposed or fitted for eternal Life*; that is, such as are modest and reachable, who hear without Prejudice, and judge without Partiality, and have no Interest of Sin or the World that stands in Competition with their Desire to obtain everlasting Happiness; such as enquire out the Truth with the same Indifference that a Traveller does his Way, who has no Inclination to one Way more than to another, but only desires to be directed right, and is resolved to take that Way which he is persuaded is the right, though it should not prove so very clean, and smooth, and pleasant, as he hoped it would; such, I say, as are of this honest and docible Mind, will be persuaded by a good Reason, especially if it be as good as the Matter is capable of, tho' it falls short of Demonstration: And if there be Reason, or Appearance of Reason on both Sides, they will judge on that Side on which the Reason seems most weighty. And for the Conviction of such as these, the standing

Revelation of the Gospel, being so well proved as it is, is abundantly sufficient; so that such shall not need new Miracles, or new Revelations. And on the other Side, such as only do need them, that is, such as being of perverse Minds, and stubborn Wills, and devoted to Sin, will not hearken to *Moses* and the *Prophets*, nor to *Christ* and his *Apostles*, speaking in the *Scripture*, would very probably receive no Benefit from new Miracles or new Revelations. For nothing will serve to convince those who will not be convinced at all; no Arguments can be sufficient to persuade a Man to that which he is strongly prejudiced and fully resolved against: And this being the Case of all those who do not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*, or are not persuaded by them, we may well conclude, with *Abraham* in the Text, that any other Means that might be used to reclaim them, would most probably prove as ineffectual as this has been, and *that they would not be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead*.

And now, having shewn, that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *holy Scripture* is sufficient to convince and persuade Men; having also shewn, that *more Proof* and *Evidence* than we have of the Truth of our Religion cannot reasonably be desired; and having likewise shewn, that any other *Proof* or *Evidence* thereof would probably be ineffectual, upon those who will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*; I have finished all that I proposed to do in discoursing on these Words.

I shall conclude all with an useful *Exhortation*; first, to *Infidels*, who will not, by all that has been said, be persuaded to admit this *divine Revelation*; and secondly, to *Christians*, who do receive it.

1. To you who are yet *Infidels*, if there are any such here, as I hope there are not; or if these Discourses shall happen to fall into the Hands of any such; I beg leave to address my self, in a few Words.

And I would desire you, in the first Place, to *prepare* and *dispose* your Minds to hear gravely, and without Prejudice, the Reasons that are offered to prove the Truth of *Christianity*, by *considering* seriously the *great Importance* of *Religion*, if it be true. And if you do but consider this, you will quickly see that it is well worth your while to be at some Pains to satisfy your selves fully whether Religion be true or not. For if Religion be true; and you cannot be sure it is not, till you have well examined the Grounds and Proofs of it; you have a great Concern at Stake, and in a Matter of such Moment, it becomes not a wise Man to be determined by a Jest or a Quibble. And if you seriously *consider* the *great Importance* of *Religion*, you will likewise readily see, that of the two you had much better be *mistaken* in *believing* the Truth of Religion, tho' it be false, than in *disbelieving* it, if indeed it be true; so that consequently, if it can ever be reasonable for a wise Man to be under a *Prejudice*, it would be most reasonable that you should be *prejudiced* on the Side of Religion. You will also then see, that if in any Case it be Wisdom to be *over-credulous*, that is, to believe beyond the Strength of the Evidence, it is so in the Case of Religion; because the greatest Damage you can suffer by *Over-credulity*, in Case Religion be all a Cheat, is infinitely less than will be the Consequence of *unreasonable Infidelity*, if indeed Religion be true.

Next, I would desire you to examine your selves seriously whether in your Enquiries into the Grounds and Reasons of Religion, you have not hitherto had some *Byass* upon your Minds; whether at the same Time that you have set your selves to consider of the Proofs of the *Christian Religion*, you have not secretly *wished* that you might not find them satisfactory to your Reason.

And if so, I desire you to examine farther, what was the Cause of this; whether

whether it was not some worldly *Pleasure* or *Profit*, which you foresaw you should be debarred from, in Case you should happen to be convinced of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*. And if it was, I hope, that the same serious *Consideration* of the great *Importance* of *Religion*, which I before advised in order to the removing unreasonable Prejudices, will also suffice to satisfy you, how unworthy of any Love or Regard all worldly *Pleasure* or *Profit* is, in Comparison with that eternal Happiness which is promised in the Gospel; so that consequently, when you are enquiring into the Grounds and Reasons of our Hope of that Eternal Life, all other Thoughts ought to be laid aside, and you ought to have no Eye at all to any Thing else; because, to a Man who must be unspeakably happy or miserable to all Eternity, which is the Case of all of us, if indeed Religion be true; it is not a Matter worth thinking of, whether his worldly State and Condition will be rendred better or worse, by his endeavouring to secure to himself a blessed Portion in the other World.

And if by these Considerations your Minds shall be freed from *Prejudices*, and from all *Byass* of worldly *Interest*; I would, after this, desire you to take afresh into your *Consideration*, what has been offered in the foregoing Discourses, for the Proof of the *Christian Religion*, and the much more that has been better said by others upon the same Argument; for there can be no Hurt in considering these Things over and over again, although after all, you should remain as unsatisfied as you are now. But I cannot but hope, I cannot but think, that if you do consider, without Prejudice or Partiality, the Reasons that have been offered to prove the Truth of *Christianity*, you must needs be convinced thereby.

However, if the Reasons that are, or may be offered for the Proof of it, should not be sufficient perfectly to cure your *Infidelity*, and to make you become zealous *Christians*; they may be, and they certainly are, sufficient to satisfy you that the *Christians* have some Reason for their Belief; even the same at least, if not better, that you your selves are swayed by in all other Cases; and consequently, that they are not such very easy and credulous Fools as you perhaps have hitherto taken them to be. I am confident you must grant, that if the Reasons of our Religion are not demonstrative, they are at least probable; and that if our Religion be not true, it has at least a fair *Shew* and *Appearance* of Truth.

And if you will but only allow this, it is then a reasonable Request, and what I would next desire of you; not to make a *Boast* of your *Unbelief*, not to *ridicule* our holy Religion, not to make it your Business to *proselyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*.

1. Not to make a *Boast* of your *Unbelief*; for if indeed you have no Religion, yet what *Interest* can you have in telling the World so? Nay, is there any Thing that you could do, more to your own Prejudice? For though you are not under the Direction and Influence of any religious Principles; yet so long as you appear to have some Religion, you will be employed and trusted as other Men are: Men will believe you to be honest, till they shall find to the contrary; and in the mean Time you will have an Opportunity of raising your selves to Wealth and Honour. But when once the World shall come to know, that you are Men of no Principles, that you are under no Restraints of Conscience, that you will do whatever you can safely do for your own Advantage; that is, whatever you can do without Danger of a Prison, a Pillory or a Gibbet; and they will have Reason to think all this of you, when you your selves shall tell them that you are of no Religion: Who, do you think, will employ you? who, do you think, will trust you? So that the only Way you will then have to make your Fortunes, will be by open Force and Violence; and in that you will meet with such Opposition from all the World, as will quickly work your Ruin.

But you think, it may be, that it is a mean and ungenerous Thing to disown your Principles, or rather your *no Principles*; that it is beneath a Man to seem to be what he is not; and to put on a Face of Religion when he has none, how profitable soever his Hypocrisy might be to him.

Very well; then you may, if you are willing to suffer the Inconvenience of it, freely own your selves to be of no Religion; but at the same Time you should do well to consider, that the greatest Part of the World is against you; that not only the ignorant and illiterate, but the wisest, the gravest, the most learned and the most noble Persons, have generally been Men of Religion; or at least, which is all we can judge by, have outwardly professed themselves persuaded of the Truth of it, and have expressed the greatest Zeal and Concern for it. And therefore,

2. Tho' you do believe nothing of it your selves, and scorn to conceal your Unbelief, you may, however, be *civil* to our Religion; for it is but *good Manners* to treat with some Respect that which those with whom you converse account sacred. Besides, whether Religion be true or false, the Subject of it is *grave*, and therefore ought to be handled with a decent *Reverence*. Do not then shew such ill Breeding, as to make that the Subject of your *Sport* and *Raillery*, which all besides your selves account the most serious Thing in the World. Be not guilty of so much Indecency, as to discourse of any Matter in a Manner so unsuitable to the Nature of it. But if you will needs be attacking our Religion, compose your selves first to Gravity and Seriousness; and let it be seen by your Way of treating us, that your Design is manly and generous, only to undeceive and disabuse us, not to make Sport with us. *Produce your Cause*, as the *Prophet* speaks, and *bring forth your strong Reasons*; by them, it may be, if you propound them seriously, you may convince us that we are in a Mistake; but we are now in too grave an Humour to be wrought upon by a *Jest*; and how strong soever your Objections against Religion are, by a light and trifling Way of expressing them, you will make them lose all their Force. But indeed,

3. To what Purpose is it for you to make it your Business, any Ways, or by any Arguments, to endeavour to *profelyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*.

For whether our Religion be true or false, it is *better* for you, as well as for all the World besides, that it should be generally believed; and that Men should think themselves obliged to live according to the Rules and Precepts of it. You cannot, surely, be so unacquainted with the World, if you have lived any Time in it, or read any Thing of History, but that you must needs know, that before the Principles of *Atheism* and *Deism* prevailed so much as they have done of late Years, there was a great deal more Truth, and Justice, and Honesty, and fair Dealing in the World than there is now. So that if you should succeed in your Endeavour, if you should be able either to reason or to laugh Religion quite out of the World, the most probable, nay the most certain Consequence of it would be, that when the *godly Man ceased*, the *faithful* would also *fail from among the Children of Men*; that then they would *speak Vanity every one with his Neighbour, with flattering Lips and with a double Heart* would they *speak*: That then *Strength* would be the *Law of Justice*, and that *which is feeble* would be *found nothing worth*.

If therefore you have, as you think perhaps you have, found out the *Cheat* of *Religion*; it is your best Prudence, however, to keep your Discovery to your selves. Delight your selves as much as you will with the Contemplation of your own Happiness above other Men, in that you are now freed from the Terrors of Conscience, and the Fears of another World, by means of that notable Discovery which you have made of the Vanity of Religion; please your selves as much as you will, with thinking that you are not now, as others are, tied to speak Truth when it is to your Disadvantage, to suffer

any Thing in this World for Conscience sake, or to be just and honest in your Dealings, when you can get considerably by Fraud and Oppression, and can order the Matter so secretly as to be safe from Discovery, and consequently from all Shame and Punishment from Men: But be the Advantage which you have gained to your selves, by discovering the Cheat of Religion, ever so great, yet the greater it is, and the greater you think it, so much the more cautious you ought to be not to make known to others what you have so happily discovered; for when once others shall come to know as much as you think you do, *viz.* that all *Religion* is a *Cheat*, all your Advantage above them will cease; they will then be all upon the same Terms with you; they will then be all as much at Liberty to defraud, oppress, or otherwise injure you, as you are now to defraud, oppress, or injure them. You ought not therefore, in Prudence, to try to convince them of their Mistake, tho' you were sure it was a Mistake; for why should you make it your Business to cut in sunder those Cords of Religion by which they are now tied up from doing you Mischief?

In a Word; Either Religion is *true* and *well-grounded*, or it is *not*; and which soever it be, it is better both for *them* that do believe the Truth of it, and for *you* also, that they should continue in the Belief of it; why then should you be at Pains only to do Mischief?

For put Case, *first*, that Religion is *vain* and *groundless*, it must be confessed however, that it is of some *present Advantage* to *them* that do believe it; because it serves to bear them up under the unavoidable Pains, and Troubles, and Miseries of this mortal Life, with the comfortable Hope of a blessed Immortality; and it will be no Disadvantage to them hereafter; for when they are dead, if indeed there be no Life after this, they will be as if they had never been; they will not be then in a Capacity of grieving for their Disappointment. And it is also for *your present Advantage*, that they that are mistaken in believing the Truth of Religion, should *continue* in their Mistake; because it makes them better to you in every Relation than they would otherwise be, more just and merciful Governors, more loyal and obedient Subjects, more loving Parents, more dutiful Children, more gentle Masters, more faithful Servants, and more just, honest, and loving Neighbours; why then should you be at any Pains to cure that Mistake, if it be a Mistake, which does *them* no Harm, but rather Good; and which is likewise so profitable for *you*? especially when you cannot be so vain as to expect to merit Heaven, if indeed there be no Heaven, by your *Zeal* for the *Truth* of *Atheism*.

But if indeed Religion be true; and you cannot be sure it is not, how deficient soever you may think our Proofs of it are; as I shall not need to say, that it will be better for *them* that believe it, that they should persist in their Belief of it; so I shall not need to say much to shew that it will, in the Event, be better for *you*, that you should not endeavour to *pervert* them; for, certainly, if there be a Hell, they will be condemned to the hottest Place in it, who not only withdrew themselves from their Subjection to Almighty God, and would not suffer him to reign over them; but made it also their Business to *corrupt* others, to form a Party against Heaven, and to raise an universal Rebellion against God.

These Things, and more to the like Purpose, I would say to the *Atheists*, if I thought they were here to hear me. And I should not be without Hope, that altho' what was said before in the foregoing Discourses was not sufficient to cure their *Infidelity*, what has been now said might serve to convince them that it is the *wisest Course* to keep their *Infidelity* to themselves; that how little soever they believe of the Truth of Religion; it is not *Prudence* to tell the World that they are Men of no Principles, and consequently

not

not fit to be employed or trusted; that it is not *good Manners* to make a Jest of serious and sacred Things, and to affront the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind; and that it is not for their *Interest* to endeavour to bring other Men over to their Side, because if none had more Religion than themselves, they could not be near so safe and secure in their Rights and Possessions, and in their Lives, they only Things they value, as they now are.

But I do not think there are any here present, concerned in this Part of my Discourse, and therefore shall lengthen it no farther. *I am persuaded* Heb. vi. 9. *better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation; for your Presence here, in the House of God, and in the Assembly of Christians, makes it reasonable to believe, that you are already convinced, not only of the Being and Providence of God, but likewise of the Truth of the Christian Religion, and of the divine Inspiration and Authority of the holy Scriptures.*

2. To you therefore who are *Christians*, I shall now turn my Discourse: *And I beseech you, Brethren, suffer the Word of Exhortation; it is only* Heb. xiii. 22. *this.*

Since you have *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and believe that they are *Messengers* sent to you from God, to instruct you in his Will; receive the Truth and the Law at their Mouths; mind what they say, and be careful to follow their Directions in all Things.

For even *we* who have the *Scriptures*, the *lively Oracles of God*, may perish for want of Knowledge, as well as they that have them not, unless we make that Use of them which they were given for; unless we are diligent in reading them, and careful to practise what they teach. For the *rich Man* spoken of in this *Parable* had the *Scriptures*, but his mere having them did not keep him from *Hell*. And his *five* surviving *Brethren* had likewise the *Scriptures*, and yet were then in a fair Way of following their *Brother* to that *Place of Torment*. *They had Moses and the Prophets*, but they did not hear them.

And this also may be our Case, who have not only *these*, but also *Christ* and his *Apostles* preaching to us, if we do not hear them; for what Advantage can it be to us to have good Instructors, if we will not mind what they say; if we stop our Ears to all their Counsels and Reproofs? No Man was ever made a Scholar only by having a good Library in his Possession: No Man ever learnt any Art or Science, tho' it was ever so well taught in any Book, only by keeping the Book in his Chamber, or carrying it about in his Pocket: And as little shall we be the wiser, only by *having* the holy Scriptures, though, as the *Apostle* says, they are *able to make us wise unto Salvation*, if 2 Tim. iii. 15. we do not read and study them with an honest Design to furnish our selves from thence with a Stock of useful Knowledge, and with a firm Resolution to lead our Lives according to the Directions which they give us.

Nay, so far shall we be from receiving any Advantage only by our having the holy Scriptures given us, and free Liberty allowed us to look into them, a Privilege we of this Nation have above most of our Neighbours, that if we do not read and study them, it will be much the worse for us; our Condemnation will be the greater, and our Destruction so much the more certain. For the Case of those who offend thro' Ignorance, when their Ignorance is unaffected, is very pitiable; and tho' we cannot certainly say how God will deal with those who had no clear Revelation of his Will made to them, this we may be sure of, that God, who is a *merciful* God, will deal *mercifully* with them. *If I had not come and spoken unto them*, says our Joh. xv. 22. *Saviour, they had not had Sin*. But the Case will be quite otherwise with those, who *knew their Master's Will, and did not do it*; they, as our Saviour Luk. xii. 47. says, *shall be beaten with many Stripes*. And it will be all one if they did not know it, if their Ignorance of it was occasioned by their own Fault, in neglecting

neglecting those Means of Knowledge which God had afforded them; and much rather, if their Ignorance of their Duty was affected and chosen, that they might sin with less Disturbance of Mind. For our Saviour's Judgment in this Case is very plain; and it is his Judgment by which we must stand or fall to all Eternity, *Joh. iii. 19. This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil.*

Having therefore *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and also *Christ* and his *Apostles*, continually preaching to us in the *Books of holy Scripture*, let us hear them; this is both our Duty and our Interest.

And that our Study of the Scripture may be with good Success, and we may thereby be *thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*, let us pray, as we are taught by our Church, in a most excellent *Collect* suited to the Subject I have been discoursing of.

Collect for 2d
Sunday in Ad-
vent.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



DISCOURSE XCVI.

The Unreasonableness of Separation.

A Visitation Sermon.

JOHN VI. 66, 67, 68.

From that Time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.



IN these Words there are four Things considerable.

I. A remarkable Accident that befell our *Saviour* in the Course of his Ministry, his being deserted at once by a great many of his Disciples: *Many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The Occasion of this great Desertion, intimated in that Clause, *ἐκ τούτου, from that Time*, or upon that Occasion.

III. A Question thereupon put by our *Lord* to those few that still remain'd with him: *He said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?* And,

IV. And lastly, the honest and discreet Answer which *Simon Peter* in the Name of the rest returned to this Question; *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.*

Each of which Particulars will afford some useful Observations, which in the Sequel of this Discourse I shall briefly touch upon, the Time not permitting me to do more, and then make some Application of the whole. I begin with the first, *viz.*

I. The Relation of a remarkable Accident that befell our *Saviour* in the Course of his Ministry, *viz.* his being deserted at once by a great many of his Disciples: *Many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* The *Evangelist* doth not say how many, but that we may probably collect from the former Part of the Chapter: For at the tenth Verse we are told, that the Number of those that were with him before, and had been miraculously fed by him with five Barley-loaves, and two small Fishes, was about five thousand; and that upon that they all of them acknowledged that he was the *Christ*, as you may see at the fourteenth Verse, *This is of a Truth*, say they, *that Prophet which should come into the World*; and thereupon presuming, according to the Notion generally received among the *Jews* at that Time, that the *Messias* was to be a mighty temporal Prince, they would fain then have persuaded him to take upon him the Kingdom. Nay, as the *Evangelist* notes at the fifteenth Verse, *They would have taken him by Force, and made him a King*; which when our *Saviour* had avoided by conveying himself privately away, they would not however be thereby diverted from pursuing their Intention; but perceiving which Way his Disciples were gone over the Sea, and supposing that he had appointed to meet them on the other Side; they took Shipping the very next Day to follow him: And when they had found him, knowing that he had not gone over in the same Boat with his Disciples, and that no other Boat had gone over besides, except those wherein they themselves had passed, so that consequently he must needs have conveyed himself over the Sea by a Miracle; they seemed hereby still the more confirmed in that Belief which they had of him before. And yet behold on a sudden, even the very same Day, upon Occasion of some Disgust which they took at his Doctrine, they all forsook him, leaving him, as it seems, alone, only with his twelve Apostles. *Many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* From whence we may observe,

1. That Infallibility itself is not sufficient to prevent Schisms and Separations in the Church. For surely *they* will not deny that our blessed *Lord* and *Saviour* himself was an infallible Teacher, who believe that his pretended *Vicar* is so; and yet for all that, he was deserted by a great many of his Disciples; there were many more that forsook him, than there were that continued to adhere to him. Nay, indeed his Infallibility may be said in some Sense to have been the Occasion of this great Schism; for the Reason of their forsaking him was, because he spake to them the Words of Truth; for had he but suited his Doctrine to the carnal Palates of his Hearers, they would still have continued with him.

And if Infallibility will not serve for this Purpose, there is, manifestly, no such absolute Necessity, no such great Usefulness of an infallible Guide in the Church, as the *Romanists* pretend; who also from thence only, without any ground from Scripture, boldly infer that there is such a one. For we have already an infallible Rule both of Belief and Practice in the Holy Scriptures; and this Rule is sufficiently plain to, and easily enough applicable by, all such as are of honest Minds, and give due Attention and Regard to it. An infallible Guide, if there were any such now-a-days, could not teach more than the Holy Scriptures do, of such Things as are necessary to be known by us; neither could he teach the same Things plainer than they teach them: And if Men were of perverse and carnal Minds, they would give no more Heed to the infallible Guide, than they do now to the infallible Rule; that is, they would hear him no longer than while his Doctrine pleased them, or while it was for their Advantage to continue in his Communion; and when either his Doctrine was ungrate-
ful

ful, or it was not safe to adhere to him; they would do by him, as the Disciples in the Text did by our *Saviour*, who was beyond all Dispute an infallible Teacher; *they would go back, and walk no more with him.*

2. Another Thing that may be observed from hence, is this, that it is no just Objection against any *Church*, that there are a great many that dislike it, and separate from it.

Let not then our Adversaries of the *Church of Rome* any more object against us, as they have used to do, that their *Church* is at Unity within itself, that they are all of one Mind, agreeing in the same Form of Doctrine, and holding together in the same Worship; whereas no sooner did the *Reformed Churches* separate from them, but they were immediately divided into innumerable *Sects* among themselves; each pretending to greater Purity and Perfection than the other. For besides that the Truth of this Matter of Fact might be well doubted, *viz.* whether there be greater Divisions among *Protestants*, than among *Papists*; which Point I will not at this Time dispute: This I dare boldly say, that the Unity which they boast of, is in great Measure owing to the Inquisition, and such other Means of holding their People in their Communion, as we neither do, nor think lawful to use.

And then after all, the Separation of other *Sects* from the *Reformed Churches* is not a juster Objection against them, than the Separation of the *Reformed Churches* themselves from the *Church of Rome*, with which they once held Communion, is against that *Church*: So that if there be any Thing in this Argument, it holds every whit as strong against them, as against us.

But the Truth of it is, the Argument it self is of no Force against either one or the other. But in the Case of Separation the only Point to be considered, in order to the discerning where the Blame lies, is for what Cause the Separation was made. For if the Ground of our separating from the *Roman Church* be, as indeed it was, because we could not communicate with her without Sin, this justifies our Separation, and is indeed a just Objection against that *Church* which enjoyed such unlawful Terms of Communion. And on the other Side, if the Doctrine that we profess and teach, be pure and orthodox, and our Worship, to say the least of it, such as may in every Part of it be lawfully joined in; if even they who dissent from us, cannot fix on any one Thing in our Communion which they can prove is unlawful; if consequently the Ground of their Separation from us, be either because *they will not endure sound Doctrine*, or because they have *itching Ears*, which nothing will please but Novelties; they indeed are highly to blame who separate from us upon such trifling Accounts; but it is no more a just Objection against our *Church*, that there are some that separate from it, than it was against that *Church* which was at first assembled, and governed by our *Lord* himself in Person, that there were some who when they had listed themselves under him and as his Disciples, did afterwards, upon an unreasonable and groundless Disgust, *go back and walk no more with him.*

3. What may farther be observed from hence in general, is this, that the Example of a Multitude is not a sufficient Inducement to follow their Practice, any farther than the same may be justified by Reason. For in the Text we are told, that many of our *Lord's* Disciples, probably not fewer than five thousand, went away from him at once, and, as far as appears by the History, there were only twelve that remained with him, a very small Number in Comparison with that great Multitude that went away; and yet there can be no Doubt, but that these were the *true Church*, and that they which went away were *Schismatics*.

From whence therefore, by the Way, we may observe, how vain and trifling that Argument is, which they of the *Church of Rome* do urge in behalf of their *Church*, and to persuade us to return to it, taken from the great Multitude of those that are of the *Roman Communion*, in Comparison with the *Reformed Churches*.

For granting that the *Roman Church* is of much greater Extent than the *Reformed*; nay, if we should grant it to be of larger Extent than all the *Christian Churches* besides, that are not of her Communion, which yet is certainly false; this is but a very sorry Argument to prove her to be the true, and only true *Christian Church*.

1 Kings xix.
18.

For if the Truth be always on the Side of the greatest Number, which was the *true Church* in *Abraham's Time*, when he was of a Religion by himself? Was it in his small Family, or amongst the *idolatrous Nations* that dwelt round about him? Or which was the *true Church* in all that long Tract of Time from *Moses* to our *Saviour*? Was it not confined to a very small Spot of Land, even when it was at its largest Extent? And that again contracted to a much less Compass in *Elijah's Time*, when there were not in ten of the *Tribes of Israel*, above seven thousand Men who had not bowed the Knee to the Image of Baal?

Again, if that be always the *true Church* which is the largest, Time was when the *Arian Hereticks* were the *true Christian Church*, and the Orthodox Professors of *Christianity*, who were but a very few in Number, in Comparison with them, were consequently miserably deluded, and rank Hereticks. And thus, according to this Rule given by the *Romanists* for finding out the *true Church*, Truth and Goodness are really nothing at all, but vary according to the Fancies and Customs of Men; and what is true and good now, may in the next Age become very false and wicked.

But by what hath been said, it appears, that the true Worshipers of God have sometimes been but a very few, and that the *true Church of Christ* has in some Ages consisted but of a very small Number; and what has been once, may be again. So that, tho' we should grant that the *Roman Church* is larger than any one, or even than all the *Reformed Churches* together; yet still these may be the *true Churches of Christ*, and that not. For why may not the true Religion, and the right Worship of God be confined to a narrow Compass now, as well as it hath been in former Times?

The Truth is, Number or Fewness, are both merely accidental and extrinsical Things; sometimes a Multitude may be in the right, and sometimes, probably much oftner, they are in the wrong; and whether they be in the right or no, is a Thing to be enquired into, not to be taken for granted. For Truth and Goodness are always the same, but the Fancies and Opinions of Men are infinitely various and uncertain. And therefore seeing God hath not left it to us to determine among our selves by most Votes, which is the true Religion, and the right Worship of God, but hath himself clearly stated and fully determined this Matter in the Books of Scripture many hundred Years ago; that Determination of his is, and will ever be most undoubtedly true: It is that therefore that we must stick to, and abide by, let the Crowd, or the Multitude go which Way it will.

And so much for the first Thing; *many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The second Thing which I took Notice of in the Words, was the Occasion of this great Schism, intimated in that Clause, *ἐκ τούτου, from that Time*, or, as it may be rendred, upon that Occasion: *Many of his Disciples went back.*

Now what the Occasion was, we must learn from the foregoing Part of the Chapter; and it was, in short, this.

Our *Saviour* well knowing the Hypocrisy of that great Crowd that followed him, and that all their pretended Zeal for him was really nothing else but Interest, plainly tells them of it, Verse 26. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the Miracles, but because ye did eat of the Loaves, and were filled;* and thereupon takes Occasion to persuade them to withdraw their Hearts and Affections from this World, and from their temporal Interests and Concernments, and to give themselves up to be instructed by him in the Way and Means of Salvation, Verse 27. *Labour not for the Meat which perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed.* And this Subject he prosecutes in the remaining Part of the Chapter, shewing by many Arguments, that there was no Way for them to attain to the Blessedness of the other World, but by receiving and believing his Doctrine, and leading their Lives according to it. And *en tête* upon this Occasion, many of them *went back, and walked no more with him.* While he fed them with the Loaves, and while they hoped he would be a temporal King, and that they, as being the first that had declared for him, should be preferred to great Places and Dignities under him, so long he could not get rid of their Company, tho' he had endeavoured to do it; but when once he came to tell them plainly of their Faults, and to dissuade them from minding so much as they did the Interests of this World; when he had acquainted them that his Kingdom was a spiritual Kingdom, and that the only Way for them to be made Partakers of it, was by carefully observing those strict Rules of Holiness and Virtue which he had taught; at this they were greatly offended; and it was now as hard to keep them together, as it was before to dismiss them: Upon this Occasion *many went back, and walked no more with him.*

From whence we may observe, and it is the only Thing I shall at present observe from hence, that it is the Duty of those who are *Ministers* of the Gospel boldly to speak the Truth, and reprove Vice, whatever Offence may be taken at them for it.

In other Things indeed it becomes them, and it is a Part of that Prudence which it is their Duty to exercise in their behaviour towards others, to be as compliant and complaisant as they can; and according to St. Paul's Example, to be *made all Things to all Men, that they may by all Means* 1 Cor. ix. 22. *gain some;* but the Truth of the Gospel is not to be parted with upon any Terms, neither may they upon any Consideration whatsoever sooth up their People in their Sins, and cry *Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace.* Nay, if they only wink at their Faults, if they only forbear to reprove them for their Sins, and to acquaint them with the Danger of continuing in them, they are careless of their Charge, and unfaithful to their Trust; and while they seem tender of giving Offence, do indeed give the greatest Offence; at once exposing their sacred Office to Contempt, and hazarding the Salvation of their own Souls. For so we are plainly told, *Ezek. xxxiii. 7. I have set thee a Watchman unto the House of Israel, therefore thou shalt hear the Word at my Mouth, and warn them from me: When I say unto the wicked, O wicked Man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked Man from his Way, that wicked Man shall die in his Iniquity, but his Blood will I require at thine Hand.*

Here, my reverend Brethren, we see our Duty, and the strict Obligation that lies upon us to discharge it. And this is what we are to look to, to do our own Duty faithfully, and leave the Issue and Event of all to God.

It may be that our Boldness in the Discharge of our Ministry, may prove a Prejudice to our worldly Interest, and many may account us *their Enemies*, and use us as such, only because we are their best Friends in *telling them the Truth*; but there is no worldly Interest whatsoever so great as to be fit to stand in Competition with the Interest of our own, and our Peoples Soul's.

Or it may be, if we will not hold our Peace; if we will needs be preaching up unpopular Truths, and lashing the reigning Vices of the Age, some will take Offence at our Freedom, and, now especially that they are, as they think, at Liberty to profess any Religion, or to be of none, will forsake our Assemblies, and either joyn themselves to some other Congregations, where they hope they shall hear more comfortable Doctrine, or perhaps will throw off at once all Shew and Profession of Religion: But be it so, the Fear, or the Probability of this, will not justify us in neglecting our own Duty, which is to *be instant in Season, and out of Season, and to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all Long-Suffering and Doctrine*. This is the Direction that St. Paul gives to Timothy, and in him to all the Ministers of the Gospel; and that too, altho' he foresaw that the Consequence of it would sometimes be, that such plain dealing would disoblige a great many, and make them forsake the Assemblies of the Faithful; for that he had this then in his Mind, seems highly probable, from what he immediately adds in the very next Words: *The Time will come when they will not endure sound Doctrine, but after their own Lusts shall they heap to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears, and they shall turn away their Ears from the Truth*.

2 Tim. iv. 2.

Verse 3.

It is true indeed, we ought, as the *Apostle* there directs, to rebuke and exhort *with all Long-Suffering*; i. e. to temper our Reproofs with such Mildness, and Gentleness, and Prudence, as that, if it be possible, we may give no Offence to any. But if it be the Truth it self that gives the Offence, and not the imprudent Manner of its Delivery, our Business is not to *please Men*, but God; and we must do our Duty, and speak the Words which he hath put into our Mouth, *and rebuke with all Authority*, not regarding what may be the Consequence of it.

We may think, perhaps, that in case our Boldness in speaking the Truth, and reproofing Vice, should drive away any from our Assemblies, especially if they be Persons of Note and Authority in the Place where they live, this would be to the Disadvantage of our Church and Religion.

But no such Matter; for all those that separate from the Church upon such an Account, we may truly say, as the Apostle St. John does of some Separatists in his Time, 1 *Epist.* ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no Doubt have continued with us*. Such are as much the Church's Enemies, before their Separation, as they can be afterwards; and of the two, she had better have them open Enemies, than secret ones. But as for all such as are of honest Minds, and sincere and hearty in their Professions, they will like us the better, for that for which the others dislike us; whereas on the contrary, if we should be afraid to do our Duty, if we should be mealy-mouth'd, and not dare to speak the Truth, for fear of the Displeasure of such Men, this would indeed be a great Prejudice to our Cause, as giving just Offence to the best Men, and too great Occasion, *to such as desire Occasion*, to flight and despise our Office.

In fine; what we can be only afraid of in this Case, is no more than what our Saviour, who knew what was in Men, certainly fore-knew would happen to himself; for he knew that the greatest Part of the Multitude that followed him, followed him for the Loaves, and in hope to ad-

vance their temporal Interest by early appearing to be his Disciples; he knew consequently, that upon his declaring the Truth to them, and reproving them for their Worldly-mindedness, they would forsake his Company; but tho' he foresaw this Event, he would not be unfaithful in his Office, nor neglect that Business for which he came into the World, which was *to bear Witness unto the Truth*; he chose rather to have but a few sincere Followers, than a great Number of hypocritical Professors; and therefore would not dissemble the Truth, altho' he knew that upon his declaring it, *many would go back, and walk no more with him.* Joh. xviii. 37

And now I proceed to the third Thing observable in the Text, *viz.*

III. The Question which our Lord (upon the Occasion of this great Desertion) puts to those that still remained with him, *Jesus said unto the Twelve, will ye also go away.*

And with what Design this Question was put, might have been doubted, if it had been put by another; but it is certain, that our Saviour did not put it to the *Twelve*, to know their Minds, for as the Evangelist says, *he knew all Men, and needed not that any should testify of Man, for he knew what was in Man.* John ii. 24

These Words therefore, *Will ye also go away?* are not so much a Question put to them, to know whether they would stay or go, as an Option given them, a leaving it to their Will and Choice, whether they would do one or the other. As if he had said, "You see how many there are that have taken Offence at my Doctrine, and have, upon that Account, all at once deserted me; but I am not at all concerned at their Departure, for I desire no Subjects, but such as are willing to be so, and will be obedient to my Words. If therefore you are of the same Mind with them, if my Doctrine does not relish with you; if your Hearts, as theirs, are wholly set upon this World, and the Interest of this Life, and you value not the having a Portion in my spiritual Kingdom, or dislike the Conditions of attaining it, it is to no Purpose for you to stay any longer with me; for this is all the Reward that I promise to my Disciples: You are at your own Liberty therefore to go or stay as you please; freely and willingly you gave up your selves at first to be my Disciples, and freely and willingly you shall continue so, or not at all; as I did not force you to follow me, so neither will I compel you to stay with me; do what you think best for your selves. If you like the Terms of my Discipleship, and think the Reward that I propose, a sufficient Encouragement, and are persuaded that I am able to make good what I promise, then stay with me; but if not, you also may follow the five thousand that are already gone away; I will not detain you against your Minds." *Will you also go away?*

From whence we may observe these two Things.

1. That it is not agreeable to the Nature of the Gospel to force or compel Men to the Profession of it.

If indeed Salvation were annexed to the outward Profession of Christianity, and every visible Member of the Church, were also a Member of Christ's spiritual Kingdom, it would be such a great Deed of Charity to entitle Men to these Benefits, as would be sufficient to compensate for any Hardship that they were put to in order to it; and if Men were, or could be forced to be saved, even altho' it were by *Fire and Faggot*; they would have no more Reason to cry out of Persecution, or to complain of any Injury that was done them, than a Man that was just ready to be drowned would have, if he that pulled him out of the Water and saved his Life, should do it by the spraining of his Arm.

But

But the Case here is otherwise, for the spiritual Kingdom of *Christ* is made up only of such as willingly submit to it; and tho' Force may make many Hypocrites, it cannot make one true *Christian*; for no outward Force can compel the Will to consent, tho' it may compel the Mouth to speak, or the Body to act.

Not but that after all, it is most undoubtedly the Duty of *Christian Magistrates* to endeavour that all their Subjects may be brought both to the Profession and Belief of the *true Christian Faith*; and to this End they ought to set up, and establish in their Dominions the *true Christian Worship*, and to take Care that their Subjects may be instructed in it; and also to give them all reasonable Encouragement in the Profession and Exercise of it.

Nay, I will not say, that they may not, for I am fully persuaded that they may, make use of the Sword wherewith God has entrusted them, for the correcting and restraining the Exorbitances of a misguided and ungovernable Zeal, and the Outrages of a mistaken Religion; and *for the cutting off of all such Workers of Iniquity, as turn Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction.*

But in what Cases it is proper to make use of the temporal Sword in Matters of Religion; what temporal Encouragements are proper to be given to the Profession of the true Religion, and what Discouragements to Error and Schism, being Subjects needful to be enquired into only by them that have the Power of making or executing Laws, are not so proper to be discoursed of here.

But in general, that no Man can, or ought to be compelled to be a *Christian*, I think is very plain from our *Saviour's* Example: For though his Kingdom was spiritual, *i. e.* though he was pleased to use only spiritual Means and Motives to engage Men to be his Disciples, he could have used other Means if he had pleased; for as he himself tells us, *Matth. xxviii. 18. All Power in Heaven and Earth was given unto him*; and therefore, if external Force and Compulsion had been a proper Means to enlarge his Kingdom, and propagate his Religion, he would, doubtless, have made use of it; or at least have commissioned and empowered his *Apostles* to use it; and not have only said to them, as he does in the Words immediately following those aforecited, *go ye therefore and teach all Nations*: He would not certainly, as he does in the Text, have left it to the Choice and Option of his own Disciples, whether they would continue in the Profession of his Religion or no: *Will ye also go away?*

2. Another Thing that may be observed from hence, is this, that no License given, no *Toleration* granted, no Exemption from temporal Penalties in case of Separation allowed by Men, is sufficient to excuse from the Guilt of Schism those that separate from the *true Christian Church*, whereof they were Members, or to render their Schism no Sin.

For what think you, if the twelve *Apostles*, upon this Leave given them by *Christ*, had gone back with the five thousand, would they not by our *Saviour* himself, at the great Day, have been judged *Schismatics* or *Apostates* for their so deserting him?

And yet, as Man, he gave them Leave to forsake him; he left it to their Choice, whether they would stay with him or no; he used no Force or Compulsion to keep them against their Wills; so that here was truly *Liberty of Conscience* granted them: They might be *Christians* if they would; if not, they might return back to the *Synagogue*, or go whither else they pleased: Here were no worldly Motives offered to them to induce them

them either to stay or to go, but the whole Matter was left to their own Conscience.

But notwithstanding this *Toleration*, as it may be called, it was most certainly their Duty still to adhere to that Profession of *Christianity*, which they had taken upon themselves; and if they had forsaken it, they would have been guilty of a most inexcusable Sin before God.

And the Case is the same now: Human Law-givers may give Leave to their Subjects to be of any Religion, or to be of no Religion; but if they do, they cannot make it lawful in it self, either to be *Atheists*, or to profess a false Religion, or to forsake the Communion of the *true Church*; for to believe a God, and to worship him publicly, and to worship him in the Assemblies of the faithful, are Duties that are laid upon us by a higher than any human Authority; and therefore no human Authority can discharge us from them.

The Law can take away and discharge us from no Obligation, but that which itself laid upon us; so that all the Meaning of the largest and most unlimited *Toleration* that the Law can grant, is no more than this; *viz.* a Declaration that Men shall not be liable to any temporal Mulcts or Penalties, or be any Ways punished by the civil Power, upon the Account of any Differences in Religion, or for being of no Religion at all: But if antecedently to the Establishment of any *Church* by the *civil Power*, and if antecedently to the enacting of any Penal Laws to oblige Men to hold its Communion, it was a Schism to separate without Cause, from that *Christian Church* whereof we were Members, and such schismatical Separation was a Sin before God; then so it will be still, notwithstanding any License or *Toleration* that may be granted by the secular Power.

But now, that before any civil Laws were enacted in Favour of the *Church*, it was unlawful for any Man to separate from that *Church* whereof he was a Member, without Cause; and that such Separation rendered Men guilty of the Sin of Schism, and that Schism was a damnable Sin; is clearly evident from Holy Scripture.

For in the *Apostles* Days, there was no civil Establishment of any *Church*; all the civil Powers then in being were either *Jewish* or *Heathen*, and *Judaism* or *Paganism* were the only established Religions; and all Profession of the *Christian Religion* was strictly prohibited under the severest Penalties: But for all that, there was a *Christian Church* even in those Days, with which all *Christians* were obliged to hold Communion, and from which it was a Sin to separate. *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship*, saith St. Luke, declaring the Practice of the first converted *Christians*; *Acts* ii. 42. Even then it was a Sin to *for-sake the assembling themselves together*, as you may see, *Heb.* x. 25. Even then it was a Duty to *mark them that caused Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which they had learned*, from Christ and his Apostles, *and to avoid them*; *Rom.* xvi. 17. Even then *Strifes* and *Divisions* were Acts of *Carnality*, as we are told, *1 Cor.* iii. 3. And *Here-sy* was then one of those *Works of the Flesh*, of which the *Apostle* says, that *they which do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.* *Gal.* v. 20.

In a Word; There was a *Christian Church* before there was any *Christian State*; and long before there were any *Acts of Uniformity* made, it was an *Apostolical Canon*, *let all Things be done decently and in Order*; *1 Cor.* xiv. 40. which obliged both the *Bishops* and *Governors* of the *Church* to ordain such Constitutions as were requisite for the decent and orderly Celebration of the publick Worship, and the *People* to submit thereunto. From

Eph. iv. 3.
Rom. xv. 6.

the very Beginning of *Christianity*, it was a Duty incumbent on all *Christians* to endeavour to *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace; and with one Mind, and one Mouth to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*: And it was always against the Nature and Constitution of the *Christian Church*, that there should be Divisions in it, or Separations from it.

Seeing therefore *Church Communion* is a Duty laid upon us by God, it plainly follows, that no human Authority can release us from our Obligation to it; and consequently, that these Words, *Will ye go away?* or, *you may go away if you will*, by what Man soever they are pronounced, cannot make it lawful for us to forsake the Assemblies of the faithful, and to leave the *Communion* of that *Christian Church* in which we were baptised, and of which we are Members, so long as the Terms of her *Communion* are lawful.

And so much for the third Thing. I proceed now to the fourth and last Thing observable in the Text, *viz.*

IV. The honest and discreet Answer that was made by *Simon Peter*, in the Name of *himself*, and the other *Apostles*, when this Option was put to them. *Will ye also go away?* says our *Saviour*; *Lord*, says he, *to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.*

From whence we may briefly observe these three Things,

1. That it is indispensably necessary to be of some *Church* or other; this is clearly intimated in the *Apostle's* Answer, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* He takes it for granted, as a Matter of which there could be no reasonable Doubt, that in Case they had left our *Lord*, they must have betaken themselves to some other Guide; and that if they had forsaken his *Communion*, they must have gone over to some other *Communion*: He supposes it as a most evident and undeniable Truth, as indeed it is, that it is not enough for a Man *to have Faith to himself*, to adore God only in his Heart, or to worship him only in his Closet; but that it is also necessary to make a publick Profession of that Religion which he is of, and to hold *Communion* with others of the same Faith and Profession, in the common Acts of Worship and Devotion. And this is a Point very needful, and well worthy to be considered by a great many that now-a-days do forsake our Churches, not to go to any other religious Assemblies, but to spend their Time in sleeping or dosing at home, or in tipling at the Ale-house. If we go from thee, *to whom shall we go?*

2. Therefore, what may be farther observed from hence is this, that seeing it is necessary to be of some Church or other, it is highly unreasonable to separate from the *Church* whereof we are Members, till we have found out a better *Church* to joyn our selves to.

Quite contrary to which is the Practice of many *Separatists*, who first desert their own *Church*, while as yet they are to seek what Religion to be of, and what *Church* to go to; they first throw off, upon some foolish Disgust or fanciful Dislike, the Religion they were bred up in, and then under a Pretence that they are making Enquiry which is the best Religion, spend all the rest of their Lives without any Religion at all.

It is indeed St *Paul's* Direction, 1 *Thess.* v. 21. That we should *prove all Things*; and this is a Text often cited by these Men in Justification of themselves; and they value themselves at no small Rate, for their having, as they think, the Scripture itself on their Side.

But they should do well to read the whole Verse throughout, and then they would see clearly how little this Text makes for them. *Prove all Things,*

Things, saith the *Apostle*; and then he immediately adds, *hold fast that which is good*. The Meaning of which last Clause is at least thus much; that when we are satisfied of the Goodness of our own Way, we should stick to it, and hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering; it being then both unreasonable and endless to make farther Trials.

But suppose we are not fully satisfied in this Point; suppose we have some little Doubts and Scruples in our Minds, whether that Religion and Way of Worship that we have been bred up in, be the best or no: Do they think that the *Apostle* would have us to be of all Religions, one after another, that so at last we may be able to judge which is best? This would be just as if a Man in his Journey meeting with several cross Ways, should go a little in one, and a little in another, and a little in a third, and so on; the certain Consequence of which would be, that having spent his whole Day in making these Trials of the several Ways that presented themselves, he would be no nearer his Journey's End at Night, than he was in the Morning.

Or do they think that he would have us be of no Religion, till we had first carefully examined into the Grounds and Reasons of all? This would be every whit as ill as the other: For there are very few that by their Parts and Learning are qualified to undertake, and fewer yet, if any at all, that have Leisure enough from the necessary Avocations of Life, to go through with such a difficult and tedious Work as this would be. So that for a Man to take this Method, would be just as if the traveling-Man before spoken of, meeting with several cross Ways, should spend his whole Day in sitting still and considering which of them to chuse, but should go in none of them; how should he ever come to his Journey's End?

But the Course that a wise Man in such a Case would take, is this. If he were left wholly to himself to judge, he would according to the best of his Skill, and as the Time and Exigence would permit, chuse that Road which appeared to him to be the right; or if he had a Guide with him, on whose Skill and Judgment he might with Prudence rely, rather than on his own, he would take that Way which he directed him to; and when he was once entred into it, he would go on steadily in it, never stopping or staying in the least, unless by some evident Tokens he should be clearly convinced that he was in the Wrong; and never leaving that Way for another, unless he were fully assured that the other was much better. A Man that takes this Course may arrive to the Place whither he designs, which it is certain that neither of the other can do: Or if after all he should be in a Mistake, yet having done his best, and taken the prudentest Method that he could, his Mistake would be pitiable and pardonable.

And I dare be bold to say, that that Man, who according to the best of his Knowledge, serves God faithfully, and worships him with a sincere and devout Heart, although in a mistaken Way, shall find more Favour with God, and fare better in the other World, than he that is *ever learning, but is never able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*; or who under a Pretence that he is quite at a Loss, and in a great Uncertainty, in what Way God would be worshiped, passes his Days without making Profession of any Religion, and never worships God at all.

And therefore before we leave that Way which we have been bred up and educated in, we should be fully convinced that we are in an Error, and fix upon some other Way to take, and be certainly assured that the Way we take is better than that we leave. *Lord, to whom shall we go? We know not whither else to go, and therefore why should we go from thee.* But,

3. And lastly. Another Thing that may be observed from this Answer of the Apostle, is this: That there can be no sufficient Reason to separate from a *Church*, which *has the Words of eternal Life*: *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the Words of eternal Life*. As if he had said,
 Matt. xxii. 16. *We know that thou art true, and teachest the Way of God in Truth: We are sure that we are safe in following thee; so that should we forsake thee, and follow another, it is impossible we should get by the Change. On a worse Guide we may easily happen, but a better we cannot have: To whom then shall we go, if we go from thee? or upon what Account should we leave thee for any other, seeing thou hast the Words of eternal Life?*

And this is a Point, that many of our *Dissenting Brethren* would do well to consider seriously of; what Reason they have to forsake the Communion of the *established Church*.

Some perhaps will say, that the Terms of her Communion are unlawful, and that they cannot with a good Conscience join in her Worship. Now whether or no they say true in this, God will judge; but if they do speak the Truth, and are really persuaded as they say, here is a reasonable Plea for Separation.

But the far greatest Part of those that separate from the *Church*, do not pretend this; they think our Worship lawful, and *occasionally*, especially to qualify themselves for an Office, they can and do join in it; and her Doctrine they likewise own to be true and agreeable to the Scriptures. They grant there is nothing necessary to Salvation wanting in our *Church*, and nothing destructive to Salvation enjoined: Nay they say farther, and that they think will fully justify them from the Charge of Schism, that the Congregations which they joyn themselves to, and do ordinarily communicate with, own the same Scriptures, profess the same Creed, worship the same God, and are in all Respects of the same Religion that we are of.

But if it be so, then why do they go from us? If they believe that we *have the Words of eternal Life*, what need they go elsewhere? what can they hope for more in the Communion of any other Church, than they might have in their own? If they are really of the same Religion with us, why do they break our Communion? why do they make a Rent and a Schism in the *Church* for nothing?

They indeed that forsake a corrupt Church, or an idolatrous Worship, they that leave the Communion of a Church, in which they think they could not be saved, act prudently and wisely; but to forsake a Church, and at the same Time to profess that they are still of the same Religion with that Church which they have forsaken, is a Practice which I think no Account can be given of. This is certainly to break the Unity of the Church for nothing, and needlessly to make a Rent and a Schism in the *Body of Christ*; and that very Thing which they plead in Excuse for their Schism, does to my Apprehension render it altogether inexcusable: For if ever Schism be a Sin, it is certainly so, when there is no Cause for it; and there can be no just Cause to leave that Church which we were bred in, and are Members of, and to go over to another which professes the same Faith, teaches the same Doctrines, and agrees in all the Essentials of Worship with that Church which we leave. For why should a Man leave the *established Church*, and go to another, or set up another against it, when by his own Confession he does not mend himself by the Change, but might have been saved as well in that Church which he leaves, as in that which he goes to?

But I know it is pleaded by this Sort of *Separatists*, that though they agree with us in the Substantials of Religion, they differ from us in the Circumstantials; and therefore go for the most Part to other religious Assemblies, because there they think God is worshiped after a purer Manner than he is amongst us: That though there be in the *Established Church* all Things necessary to Salvation, and she has the *Words of eternal Life*; yet she has also some unnecessary Observances, some Rites and Ceremonies which they think might be better omitted, and which are not used in those Religious Meetings which they join themselves to.

But to this the Answer is easy: Either these Circumstantials of our Worship, these Rites and Ceremonies are lawful to be used, or not; now if they be not lawful to be used; if, for Instance, it be unlawful to be present at, and to join in those Prayers which the Minister puts up while he is cloathed with a white Garment; or if it be unlawful to receive the Sacrament upon the Knee, why do they ever do these Things at all? why do they do that to qualify themselves for an Office, which if it be a Sin, they ought not to do to *gain the whole World*? But if these Things be lawful, and the only Thing they have to say against them, is, that they are in their Opinion needless and superfluous Observances; what a small Reason is this to make a Schism and Division in the *Church*? There can be no End of Separations and Divisions if they may be justified by such fanciful Dislikes as these; for the Fancies of Men are so infinitely different as to such Things, that it is impossible that the same should please all People; so that either Church Communion is no Duty, or else such Dislikes of the Fancy only cannot be a sufficient Ground of a Separation; for there is no Congregation where the *Minister* is not cloathed with some Garment or other, and where the *Sacrament* is not received in some Posture or other; and there is no Garment or Posture, which some may not have a Fancy against, as well as against these, and with as good Reason. Nay, not only the Fancies of diverse Men, but even of the same Men at diverse Times, are so very different as to such Things, that what they like one Day, they oftentimes dislike as much the next; so that he that goes from a pure and orthodox *Church* upon such trivial Accounts, cannot tell himself whither he shall go at last; but it is most probable, that if he goes on thus indulging his Fancy, he will be one Day of this *Sect*, another of another; and a third of a third; till at last having tried all *Sects*, and found in every one something that he disliked, he will come to be of no Religion at all. Or if not so; yet it is highly probable, that while he thus busies himself about the Ceremonies and Circumstantials of Religion, he will neglect the Substance of it, and omit the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith, without which all his Zeal for the external Purity of the divine Worship will avail him nothing.

Thus having, as briefly as I could, run through all those Particulars which the Text offered to our Meditation; I proceed in a few Words to apply what hath been said; and indeed the Application is so easy, that I shall not need to be long in it.

For as it hapned to our *Saviour* in the first Verse of the Text, so it hath hapned to this Church whereof we are Members; many that formerly joyn'd in her Communion, and seemed as hearty and zealous in it as any, have of late forsaken her.

I will not make the Application so near, as to say that they then followed her for the Loaves, and for their temporal Interest; though their

leaving her just at this Time, might well enough make that be suspected; neither will I say, that the true Reason of their leaving her, is, because her Doctrine is too pure, and too good for them.

But whatever was the Motive of their Separation, it is Matter of Fact that there are many now gone away, though God be thanked not near so many; as it was bragged there would be, if ever a Toleration were granted, *many there are that are gone back, and will now walk no more with us.*

But the Number of *Separatists* from any Church is not, as I have shewed, a just Objection against it; neither ought it to be any Inducement to others to follow their Example; for what hath now hapned to our Church, is not near so much as befell our *Lord* himself, who had five thousand *Disciples*, that deserted him at once, while only *twelve* remained with him.

And what he said to them, I may say to you that still continue in our Communion; if you are disposed to follow the Example that these have set you, you have now free Liberty to do it: You also may go away if you please; there is no Restraint now laid upon you by the Laws; the whole Matter is between God and your selves.

But nevertheless, let me tell you, you are still as much obliged in Conscience to hold Communion with us, as ever you were; and if we have the *Words of eternal Life*; if the Doctrine which we profess and teach, be pure and orthodox; if the holy Sacraments are duly and rightly administered among us; and if our Worship be such as you may lawfully join in, here is no just Ground for a Separation; and if you separate without just Ground from the *Established Church*, in which you were born and bred, and with which you ought to hold Communion in sacred Things, you rend the Body of *Christ*, and are *Schismatics* before God, altho' you are not guilty of any *State-Crime*, nor incur any legal Penalties.

Consider well then what you do; if we have the *Words of eternal Life*, why should you leave us? what can you hope for more in any other Communion?

Consider at least, before you go away from us, whither you will go when you have left us; and forsake not this Church, till you are sure you have found out a better, to join your selves to.

It was very reasonably put by *Joshua* to the Children of *Israel*, *Josh. xxiv. 15. If it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this Day whom you will serve; whether the Gods that your Fathers served, that were on the other Side of the Flood, or the Gods of the Amorites in whose Land ye dwell:* And it is no less reasonable in this Case. Some Religion you must be of, or else you can have no Hope of Salvation; and whatsoever Religion you are of, it must needs be your Duty to make a publick Profession of it; so that if you forsake the *Established Church*, you must go to some other: Chuse you then, before you forsake the Religion and Communion that you were brought up in, chuse you, I say, what Religion you will be of, what Communion you will adhere to.

Will you return back again into *Egypt*? or, in the Words of *Joshua*, *will you serve the Gods that your Fathers served, that were on the other Side of the Flood?* I mean, will you go over to the Church of *Rome*? *i. e.* will you go to a Church that has most notoriously corrupted the Faith of *Christ*? To a Church that takes away the Key of Knowledge from her People, not suffering them to look into the *Holy Scriptures*, which

are the Oracles of God, and the Words of Life? To a Church that has enlarged her Creed to double that of the Apostles; and enjoins as necessary to Salvation, the Belief not only of the greatest Falsities, but of the most evident Contradictions? To a Church, whose publick Service is not understood by her Members, and which makes her Children say *Amen*, to they know not what? In fine; will you go to that Church, whose Worship and Service you cannot join in, without being guilty of Idolatry?

What is there in this Church that can charm or tempt you to her Communion, unless perhaps it be the very easy Terms on which she promises you Salvation?

And this indeed is a reasonable Inducement to such as would fain go to Heaven, and yet are resolved not to part with their beloved Sins; but in a Matter of such great Importance to us, as this is, it is good to go upon sure Grounds, and not to try an Experiment, that, if it fails, will be fatal to us.

Now, that Faith and Obedience will carry us to Heaven, is agreed on all Hands; and the Scripture itself plainly assures us; but that any Thing less will do it, we have no good Ground to believe. And particularly, that Confession, with the Priest's Absolution, will do as well as a holy Life; that those that want good Works of their own, may for Money, or by some slight Penances, purchase as much as they want, of those who abound in Merit: And that they who take little or no Care of themselves while they live, may have sufficient Care taken of them by their Friends, when they are dead: These are very comfortable Doctrines indeed, but they are no where taught in Scripture, nor grounded upon Reason; they are Doctrines, for the Truth of which we have only their Word, whose Gain in teaching them is so evident, as may justly render their Testimony suspected.

But without entring upon a particular Examination of them; this one Thing alone is a sufficient Prejudice against all such easy Methods of Salvation, by whomsoever proposed; that they are clearly contrary to that Account which our blessed Saviour, who is Truth itself, hath given us of the Way to Heaven; and to that Advice which he grounds thereupon, *Matth. vii. 13, 14. Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way, that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way, that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

Well then; if you will not go over to the Church of Rome; whither is it that you will go when you leave us? Will you go and join your selves to any of the separate Assemblies here at home? But if so, to which of them will ye go? For here is such Variety of Ways at once offered to you, as is enough perfectly to confound and distract you.

I have not Time now to tell you how many several Sects there are of Dissenters from the Church, and much less to give you a just and complete Character of them, that you may consider which of them to chuse; but in general they may be reduced to these four Sorts.

1. Some of these Sects there are, that have either no Creed, or no Sacraments, or no Orders, or no Rule to guide them by, but the Light within them; Will ye go to any of these? But if you do, can you tell what Religion you shall be of, or whether you shall be of any at all?

2. Others of them there are, that positively deny the most fundamental Articles of the Christian Faith, as the Doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity, the

the Incarnation of the *Son of God*, the Satisfaction of our *Saviour*, and the like; *Will ye go to them?* But if you do, this is to add Heresy to your Schism, and to multiply your Iniquity.

3. Others again there are that teach such Doctrines, as either directly, or in their immediate Consequences, give too great Encouragement to Vice, by rendring a good Life unnecessary: But I hope I have already mentioned a sufficient Prejudice against all such easy Religions, so that you will not so much as once think of going to them.

4. Lastly, others there are that profess the same Faith with the Church, and are, as they themselves say, of the same Religion that we are of; and differ from us only in some external Modes and Rites of Worship. Will you go over to these?

But why should you make a Schism in the Church for nothing; only because her Rites and Ceremonies are not exactly suited to your Fancy? Why should you break the Unity of that Church whereof you are Members, and with which you agree in all the Essentials of Doctrine and Worship, only for the Sake of two or three harmless Ceremonies? which she uses indeed in her publick Worship for Decency and Order sake; but which she enjoins not as any Parts of Religion, or as Things necessary in themselves, and which being no where forbidden in Scripture, cannot, to be sure, be unlawful to be used; for *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression.*

If then the *Sect* you design to go to, be of the same Religion with the Church that you leave, why should you leave her, seeing by your own Confession, she has the *Words of eternal Life*, as well as they? And if she has, to what Purpose should you go elsewhere?

Is it, first, for better Prayers that you go thither? That can hardly be; however, it is what you cannot be sure of, not knowing what their Prayers will be, till you have heard them.

Our Prayers indeed are known what they are; they are free to be read and examined by all: You may, if you will, satisfy your selves before you join in them, that they are directed to the right Object of our Worship; that they are composed of such Petitions as are proper to be put up in publick; and that they are grave and serious, and fitted to excite Devotion; whereas, if you go to the separate Assemblies, you know not what God you shall worship, at least you know not with what you shall serve God till you come thither; you are much like a Man that subscribes a Paper or Petition to his Prince without reading it.

Or, secondly, is it for better preaching that you go thither? That is even as it happens, and you may as easily be disappointed in this, as in the other Case.

And, without magnifying our selves too much, this I am sure I may safely say, that many that have gone from their own Church, to a separate Assembly, to hear a better Sermon, have heard a worse.

But however that be, so long as the Doctrine that is preached in both Places, is the same, as you grant it is, there cannot be so much Difference in the Words and Phrases wherein it is expressed, or in the Manner of its Delivery, as will serve to justify a Schism.

1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. And besides, what the *Apostle* says, is most undoubtedly true, *Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but it is God that giveth the Increase.* If the Seeds be both of the same intrinsick Goodness, as is now supposed, one may be the more beautiful to the Eye than the other, but the only Things on which their Fruitfulness will depend, are the Goodness of the Soil they are sown in, and the Blessing of Heaven: And the Grace of God, who is the *God of Peace and Order*, may, I am sure, be much more reasonably expected

DISCOURSE XCVII.

God's Design in afflicting good Men.

Preached on the thirtieth of January.

(*****)

JOHN IX. 3.

Jesus answered, Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents; but that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.



HE Occasion of these Words may be seen in the foregoing Verses: *As Jesus passed by, he saw a Man which was blind from his Birth; and his Disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this Man sinned, &c.*

For the right understanding of which Words of our Saviour, we must first enquire into the Ground and Meaning of the Disciples Question; *Master, who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind?*

And the Ground and Reason of their Question seems to be an Opinion which they had entertained, That the good and evil Things of this Life were by the divine Providence always proportioned to Men according to their different Deserts; and particularly, that whenever God sent upon any Man any fore and extraordinary Affliction, some great Offence, or extraordinary Provocation was always the Reason of it.

And this indeed is an Opinion that is too generally received in the World, and is the Occasion of those rash and uncharitable Censures, which People are too apt to pass upon others, from the Consideration of the evil Things which they see do befall them in this Life.

They can hardly forbear thinking that Man a great Sinner, whom they see very sorely afflicted, although they themselves know nothing that he has done amiss; nor perhaps ever heard any Thing ill of him: But the Judgment of God, they presume, is right; and they take it for granted, that he would not have inflicted such a Punishment upon any Man, if he had not well deserved it.

So the Inhabitants of the Island on which St. Paul was shipwrecked argued, with respect to him, when a Viper out of the Fire had fastned on him; *Acts xxviii. 4. When the Barbarians saw the venomous Beast hang on his Hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this Man is a Murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the Sea, yet Vengeance suffereth not to live.*

And thus also the Disciples seem to have thought, viz. that such a great Calamity as Blindness, would not have been sent upon any Man, but for some very great Fault; tho' what the Fault was, or where the Fault lay, they could not guess.

Had the Man been suddenly struck with Blindness, they would have made no Doubt but that it was a Judgment of God upon him, for some great Crime that he himself had committed; altho' they had not been able to name the particular.

But his Case was extraordinary, for he was born blind; so that the Calamity was sent upon him before he could have done any Thing to deserve it; and so what Account to give of this, they could not tell.

But they seem to have heard of the Opinion of the *Pythagoreans*, which Grot. in Loc. was embraced also by some among the *Jews*; who held that there is a Transmigration of Souls from one Body to another; so that consequently, every Man that is born into the World, had a Pre-existence in some former State. And if this Opinion were true, they could not tell, but that this Man's Blindness from his Birth might be a Punishment sent upon him by God, for his Misbehaviour in that former State which he was in.

Or if not so; yet they remembred, that it was threatned in their own Law, that God would sometimes *visit the Sins of the Fathers upon their Children*: And so they could not tell but that this Blindness of the Child was designed as a Punishment to his wicked Parents, and that the Sin of the Father or Mother was hereby visited on their Son.

One or the other of these, they took for granted, was the Cause of this Man's Blindness, viz. that it was a Judgment of God upon him, either for the Wickedness of his Parents, or else for some great Crime committed by himself, in some State that his Soul had formerly been in, before it was united to this Body: And therefore they came to our Saviour to be resolved which of them it was. *Master, say they, Who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind?*

In Answer to which Question, our Saviour, wisely avoiding to satisfy their Curiosity, in a Point that it was needless for them to know, viz. whether the Soul has any Existence, or is capable of contracting any Guilt, before it comes into the Body; tells them, that they had misstated the Case; that the Question should not have been, Whether this Man's Blindness was a Judgment or Punishment inflicted on him, for his own, or for his Parents Sin? but, whether it was at all designed for a Punishment of Sin; or whether it was inflicted for some other Cause? for that the temporal Evils that befall Men, are not always for Punishment, but are sometimes designed for quite other Purposes; and that this last was the Case of the Man they had asked about. *Jesus answered, Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents; that is, it is not any extraordinary Wickedness, either in this Man, or his Parents, that was the Reason of his Blindness; but it was, that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

The Meaning of which last Clause, as spoken with a particular respect to the blind Man, I take to be this; that he was therefore born blind, to give Occasion to our Saviour to exert and manifest his Power, in the miraculous Cure of such a Defect, or Imperfection, in the Body of this Man, as by any natural Means or Remedies that could be used, was altogether incurable; and thereby to give an undeniable Proof, that he was endued with a divine Power,

Power, and consequently that he was the *Messiah*. He was therefore born blind, that the Power of our *Saviour* should be manifested in him.

But as the Words may be generally understood, and applied to any other Case of the like Nature, the Meaning is this; that when any temporal Evil or Affliction befalls any Man, which is not designed for a Punishment of his Sin, and to make him an Example of the divine Vengeance, it is not however by any Oversight or Carelessness of Providence, that he is so afflicted; but that there is always some other good and wise End of Providence designed to be served by it. *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents;* that is, they have not either of them so sinned, as that he should be born blind, for a Punishment of his own or their Sin; *but he was therefore born blind, that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

From the Words thus explained, I shall take Occasion, very briefly, to do these two Things:

I. To shew, that the temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin.

II. To shew, what other wise Ends of Providence the temporal Evils and Afflictions that befall good Men, do serve for.

I. I shall shew, that the temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin: *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents, that he should be born blind;* says our *Saviour*.

And what was true in his Case, is undoubtedly true in a great many others; and the holy Scripture it self furnishes us with several Examples of this Kind: But that of *Job* being one of the most remarkable, I shall at present instance only in that.

Where, first of all, we may take Notice of the Character that is given of him by the holy Spirit of God, *Job i. 1. That Man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.* So far was he from being a greater Sinner than others, that on the contrary, there was none upon Earth, at that Time, so good as he: *Hast thou,* says God himself, *considered my Servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth?* *Job i. 8.* Certainly then, if any Man could ever merit to be exempted, even from the common Miseries and Calamities of human Life, it was he. And yet it pleased God to order it quite otherwise: And in him that Observation of the Wise Man was strictly verified, *That there be just Men, unto whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked.*

Ecc. viii. 14.

For if, in the next Place, we take Notice of the Afflictions which befell this good Man, I believe we may truly say, that there is no Example of any the greatest Sinner that ever lived, that was so hardly dealt by, as he was.

Sometimes indeed, a mighty Oppressor is forced to disgorge his ill gotten Wealth, and is on a sudden, from the greatest Plenty, reduced to the most miserable Want. Sometimes again, a notorious Sinner, who escapes in his own Person, is very severely punished in his Children; and has his Punishment multiplied, by enduring, in the Misery of every one of them, whom he loves as himself, as much Pain and Torment, as he would do if the Calamity that befell them had befallen himself. And again, the Punishments that are inflicted upon Men in this Life by the divine Providence, are commonly single, either miserable Want and Poverty, or some painful Sickness or noisom Disease, or perhaps a violent or untimely Death. And when any of these Evils befalls any Man, we can scarcely forbear crying out, A Judgment! a Judgment! Surely this Man was a great Sinner, or else he would not have been so afflicted!

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What

What then should we have thought of a Man, in whom all these Miseries and Afflictions were united, as they were in Job? *Who was, one Day, the greatest of all the Men of the East, having seven thousand Sheep, and three thousand Camels, and five hundred Yoke of Oxen, and five hundred She-Ases, and a very great Household; and the next Day was bereft of all his Substance, and left as naked as he came out of his Mother's Womb; who was one Day blessed with ten hopeful Children, who were very obedient to their Father, and very loving to one another; and the next Day, was deprived of them all at once, and that too by a violent Death, by the Fall of an House upon their Heads.* And it added not a little to the Greatness of these Afflictions, that they came all upon him suddenly, when no such Evils were foreseen, or could reasonably be feared; and that they happened all at the same Time; the Messenger of one ill Piece of News having scarcely told his Tale, before he was succeeded by another, the Messenger of a worse.

But hitherto he had suffered only in his Estate, and in his Children; but it was not long, before he was brought to suffer likewise in his own Person; and that too in the worst Manner that the Devil himself could devise; such a Manner, as perhaps no other Man, either before or since, hath ever suffered; being smitten all over with sore Boils, from the Sole of his Foot unto his Crown, so that he had not one sound Part in his whole Body.

And who would not have thought this Evil, especially when added to all the others afore-mentioned, a sufficient Indication of God's high Displeasure against him? Who that had seen such a miserable Object as he then was, would not have concluded, as his Friends then did, that all these Calamities were certain Expressions, and sure Tokens, of God's severest Vengeance upon him, for some great and crying Sins, well known to God, altho' concealed from the World?

It is true indeed, all this while his own Life was spared; the Devil had no Permission from God to touch that; and he was not, as some notorious Sinners sometimes are, taken off by an untimely Death. But his Affliction was not the less, but much the greater for this. For though an untimely Death, to such as live in Ease, and Plenty, and Prosperity, and Sin, may be justly reckoned a Misfortune; yet most certainly, to such as are good Men, and yet are in extreme Want, or Pain, or Misery, it is a great Happiness to be delivered out of their sad and wretched State, tho' it be by Death. And so this good Man thought it would have been to him, and therefore, as patient as he was, could not forbear cursing the Day wherein he was born to endure such Misery, and heartily wishing for Death to put an End to it. *Wherefore, says he, is Light given to him that is in Misery, and Life unto the bitter in Soul? which long for Death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid Treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the Grave.*

Thus you see, that all those Miseries and Calamities of Life, which when they singly befall Men, are sometimes Acts and Expressions of the divine Vengeance upon them, for some great and crying Sins, did all together befall this good Man; of whom yet, in the midst of his Calamity, God himself gives this excellent Character, *And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my Servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man, one that feareth God, and escheweth Evil? And still he holdeth fast his Integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without a Cause.*

And this one Example alone, is, I think, a sufficient Proof of the first Point I was to speak to; which was to shew, that the temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin.

But the Day we are here met together upon, may likewise furnish us with another great Example of it, in our late gracious Sovereign King CHARLES I. And we should be injurious to his Memory, if we should not, now at this Time, briefly reflect thereupon. Of whom we may say, as was said of Job, *That he was a perfect and upright Man, one that feared God, and eschewed Evil*; for even his greatest Enemies, his wicked Murderers, could not charge him with any Vice or Immorality; nor even with any Frailty or Infirmary, but such as might be consistent with Integrity of Heart and Mind: And of whom, if we consider him as a King, we may, I think, truly say, (for what Profit can there be in flattering the Dead? especially one, whom a great many now adays make it their Business, and, I suppose, hope to find their Interest in it, to blacken and defame) as was said of good King Josiah; *Like unto him, was there no King before him*: May there after him, arise many like him.

2 Kings xxiii.
25.

A King, that could not, by the Softness of his Education, nor by the Ease and Plenty of a Court, nor by the many bad Examples that were ever before his Eyes, of those who had greater Restraints upon them than he had, be tempted to any Luxury, or Excess, or Extravagance in his Way of Living.

A King, whom the Pleasures of Sense, of which he had, or might have had, as great a Share as any, could not make in Love with Pleasure, or fond of this World; and whom the Multitude of Cares and Business that attend a Crown could not make to neglect or omit his constant Exercise of Devotion.

A King, that naturally cared for his Subjects, and pitied them as a Father does his Children; that readily condescended to any Thing that he thought was for their Good; and would have granted more than he did to them, if he could have done it without betraying the Rights of the Crown, where-with he was entrusted; and, which he valued more, the Interest of Religion. And indeed, rather than do either of these, he was contented to lose, not only his Crown from off his Head, but his Head too.

Such was the Saint of the Day, whose Memory we now celebrate, and whose Death we lament. A Sinner indeed we cannot deny him to be, in the same Sense in which the Scripture says that all Men are Sinners; and that *there is not a just Man upon Earth, that doeth Good, and sinneth not*: But excepting only the Weaknesses of human Nature, and such Slips and Infirmities as the best of Men are liable to, we may truly say of him, as was likewise said of Josiah, that *He did that which was right in the Sight of the Lord, and turned not aside, to the right Hand, or to the left*.

Rom. iii. 23.
Eccl. vii. 20.

2 King. xxii. 2.

And yet to this just Man it hapned according to the Work of the Wicked; or rather, much worse. For though there have been many cruel Tyrants, and bloody Persecutors, and Monsters of Wickedness, which have been made Examples to the World of the divine Vengeance; yet hardly hath it hapned even to the worst of them, so ill as it did to this the best of Kings, and the best of Men.

They have indeed, some of them, been over-powered by some neighbouring Prince, displaced from their Government, and driven into Exile; and they have, others of them, been risen up against by their own oppressed Subjects, and either slain in Battel, or else, being overcome, they have been deposed from their kingly Power, shut up in Prison, and secretly murdered; the just and wise Providence of God so permitting it to be: But in all History, I believe there is no Example parallel to this in every Respect, scarcely any like it; that a Sovereign King, even while he was owned a King, should have an Army of his Subjects levied in his Name, and, as it was pretended, by his Authority, against his Person; that they that endeavoured to depose and

and kill him, should yet give out, that they were fighting for him; and that, when they had got him into their Power, they should set up a Court of Judicature upon him, composed out of his own Subjects, who had sworn Allegiance to him; that there they should formally arraign and try him, against whom only Treason could be committed, for the Crime of High Treason; and that at last they should proceed so far in their hypocritical Impiety, as to pass Sentence of Death on him, from whom only the Judges of Life and Death could legally derive their Power; and to execute, as a villanous Malefactor, the Father of their Country, their rightful Lord and Sovereign.

The Evils that he suffered, considered in themselves, were as great as could well be endured; but the Manner in which they were inflicted, and the Persons from whom he suffered them, were highly aggravating Ingredients in his Affliction; so that all Things considered, perhaps no Man, our Lord and Saviour only excepted, did ever suffer more.

And now, from these two great and notable Examples, I hope we are sufficiently convinced, that the temporal Afflictions which befall Men, are not always certain Tokens of God's Displeasure; nor always designed for the Punishment of their Sin upon whom they are sent.

And what we should learn from the Consideration of this Point, is, to beware how we pass a Judgment upon any Man, from what befalls him in this Life; because such Judgment, if it be not false, is, at the best, rash and uncertain; and we cannot, as the wise Man says, *know Love or Hatred by all that is before us; for all Things come alike to all, and there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.* And though nothing comes to pass by Chance, and no Evil of any Kind ever befalls any Man, but by the Designation of the divine Providence; yet the very same Event, which to one Man is an Expression of God's Anger, to another Man may be an Instance and Token of his Kindness; and therefore, when we cannot certainly tell which it is, Charity obliges us to believe the best.

Eccles. ix. 1, 2.

And this leads me to the second Thing propounded; which was,

II. To shew what other wise Ends of Providence are served by the temporal Evils and Afflictions which befall Men. *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents, that he was born blind, but that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

And what was said of this Man's Blindness, is as true of any other worldly Evil that at any Time befalls any Man; if it be not intended for Punishment, as it is not always, there are some other Works of God that may be manifested thereby; some other wise Ends of Providence that it is designed for.

But in discoursing on this Head, it would be great Presumption to pretend to mention all the Ends of Providence, in any of its Dispensations; seeing *the Righteousness of God is like the great Mountains, and his Judgments are a great Deep, and his Ways past finding out.* Nevertheless, there are two Ends of Providence which are general; and which, I believe, we may say, are always designed in all the Afflictions of good Men, besides others which may be special, and peculiar to some Cases, or which we may not have Wisdom enough to discern; viz. 1. The spiritual Improvement of the Persons afflicted, whereby they will be entitled to a greater Reward in Heaven: And, 2. The Benefit of others, who beholding their good Example, may be thereby both directed and encouraged in the Practice of those Virtues which are proper to an afflicted State.

Psal. xxxvi. 6.
Rom. xi. 33.

1. One End of Providence, in sending Afflictions upon good Men, is for their spiritual Improvement in Grace and Virtue, whereby they will be entitled to a greater Reward in the other World. For there is no Man so

good,

good, but he may be made better; and there is no one State of Life, in which there is Opportunity of exercising all Virtues; and therefore, tho' a Man be as perfect as any Man can be, in that State wherein he now is, yet if he be called to another State, and hath Trial made of him another Way, he may, and if he acquits himself well, he will thereby be rendered more perfect.

And accordingly, it is observed by the Apostle, *Heb. ii. 10.* that even our blessed Lord and Saviour himself was made perfect through Sufferings; and *Heb. v. 8.* that though he were a Son, yet he learned Obedience by the Things which he suffered: And that this same is the Design of God in the Chastisement and Correction of all his Sons, we are told by the same Apostle, *Heb. xii. 10, 11.* He chasteneth us for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness. And though no Chastening for the present, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless after ward it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

And upon this Account the holy Psalmist thankfully acknowledges the Kindness of God, in laying Afflictions upon him, *Psal. cxix. 71.* It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy Statutes. And the Apostle exhorts us, to count it all Joy, when we fall into diverse Temptations; knowing this, that the trying of our Faith worketh Patience: And let Patience, says he, have her perfect Work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

So that to what was said before, that temporal Adversities and Afflictions are not always Marks of God's Displeasure, we may now add this, that when they befall good Men, they are Tokens and Expressions of his Kindness. He means thereby to make them more perfect in Holiness, that so they may be capable of a more perfect Happiness; these light Afflictions which are but for a Moment, working for them a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory; as the Apostle speaks, *2 Cor. iv. 17.* For the more they are tried, the more they will be refined and purified. And the greater Difficulties they are put to encounter, being enabled by the divine Grace to conquer them, their Victory will be so much the greater, when they overcome; and their Crown will be so much the more glorious.

And therefore our Saviour pronounces a Blessedness to such as are reviled and persecuted; and commands his Disciples rather to rejoice, than to be cast down, when such Things happen to them, *Matth. v. 10, 11, 12.* Blessed are they which are persecuted for Righteousness sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when Men shall revile you, and persecute you. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your Reward in Heaven.

And that this was one End and Design of Providence in the Afflictions of our late martyred Sovereign King CHARLES the First, cannot be doubted, by those who reflect upon his Carriage and Deportment under his Afflictions.

An excellent Man indeed he was before: But nevertheless we may truly affirm, that he was much improved and bettered by his Sufferings. And of his profiting under them, all they were Witnesses, not only his Servants, his Chaplains, his Friends, but even his Enemies, who attended him in his Re-

* ΕΙΣΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ
or, The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty, in his Solitudes and Sufferings.

† Life of John Milton, printed 1699.

|| Vindication of K. Charles the Martyr, &c. 2d Edit. with Additions, 1697.

straints, and have given Testimony to the World of his Piety, and Meekness, and Patience, and Charity. And that excellent Book * composed by himself, in the Time of his Distresses, will, I suppose, be an everlasting Evidence thereof to after Ages, notwithstanding the Endeavours that have been formerly used by some to prove it spurious; and the Confidence of a late † Author asserting it to be so, without either producing any new Evidence for the Proof of his Assertion; or offering one Word in Answer to those || just and rational Exceptions that had been made before, to those only Testimonies which he insists upon, to prove it a Forgery; or making any Excep-

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ons to those later Evidences that have been produced to prove it authentic.

But, to use his own Phrase, *we may cease to wonder*, that he should have the Boldness, without Proof, and against Proof, to deny the Authority of this Book, who is such an Infidel as to doubt, and is shameless and impudent enough, even in Print, and in a Christian Country, publicly to affront our holy Religion, by declaring his Doubt, *That several Pieces under the Name of Christ and his Apostles*, he must mean those now received by the whole Christian Church, for I know of no other, *are supposititious; although through the Remoteness of those Ages, the Death of the Persons concerned, and the Decay of other Monuments which might give us true Information, the Spuriousness thereof is yet undiscovered.*

*Life of J. Mil-
ton, p. 91, 92.*

And it is much to be feared that all your pious Designs and Endeavours to suppress Vice and Immorality, for which, if they succeed according to the Hopes of all good Men, you will highly deserve the Blessing, not only of the present Age, but of all Posterity too, which will inherit a Blessing by your means; it is, I say, much to be feared, that these your pious Designs and Endeavours will not have altogether so good an Effect as might be wished; so long as the Foundation of all revealed Religion is so openly struck at, and the publick Records and Evidences of our Christianity, are, without Controul or Censure, suffered to be called in Question. For if any of the *Pieces*, as he calls them, *under the Name of Christ and his Apostles*, which are received by the whole Christian Church, as Portions of divine Revelation, *are spurious and supposititious*; who can tell but that those which forbid Swearing, and Drunkenness, and Fornication, and Adultery, and other abominable Lusts not fit to be named, are so, as well as those, which I suppose this Author chiefly aims at, which deliver to us the Doctrine of the Trinity, and other Articles of our Christian Faith? And therefore seeing the heavenly Doctrines, and the pure and perfect Precepts of Christianity are both *built upon the same Foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone*; if this Foundation be pecked at, and undermined, and so weakened, that one Part of the Building falls to the Ground, I doubt it will be impossible, by any Art, to uphold the other. But to return to my Subject.

2. Another End of God's Providence in sending Afflictions upon good Men, is, for the Benefit of others; who beholding their good Example, may be thereby both directed and encouraged in the Practice of those Virtues which are proper to an afflicted State.

This was probably the Reason of *Job's* Afflictions; this most certainly was one Reason why the History thereof, and of his Behaviour under them, is recorded in the holy Scripture; that by his Example others might be incited to the like Patience and Submission to the divine Will, under all the Adversities of this Life.

Nay, this was, in Part, the Design even of our Saviour's Sufferings, as we are told by St. Peter, 1 Pet. ii. 21. *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye should follow his Steps.*

And therefore this also, we may reasonably think, was one End and Design of Providence, in the Afflictions of our late martyred Sovereign, whose Memory we this Day celebrate.

For to excite Men to the Practice of difficult Virtues, there is Need, not only of Precept to direct, and of Promise to stir up their Endeavours; but likewise of Example, to shew them that the Duties commanded them are not impracticable; and thereby to encourage them to do their utmost, in an Assurance that their Labour shall not be in vain.

And the Examples of Kings and great Persons being generally the most taken Notice of, and also, upon other Accounts, more influential than the Examples of meaner Men; it was agreeable to the Goodness of God, and the Wisdom of Providence, to chuse him out for this Purpose, that he might be an excellent Example to his own, and to all succeeding Ages, of all the Graces and Virtues, that are proper to almost every State and Condition of Life that Men can be in; and to this End, it was expedient that God should expose him to diverse Temptations, and put him upon almost every Kind of Trial: In all which he acquitted himself bravely, like a Man, and like a Christian.

For in his Prosperity he was not high-minded; he did not trust in uncertain Riches; he did not forget God; he did not despise the Poor; he was guilty of no Excess in the Use of sensual Pleasures. So that in him, amidst the Glories of a Crown, and the Splendor and Plenty of a Court, you might have seen all that Humility, that Temperance, that Chastity, that Contempt of the World, that Mortification and Self-denial, and that strict and regular Piety and Devotion, which might be expected, but is not always found, even in a religious Cloister.

And yet in his Adversity, when it pleased God to make Trial of him that Way, he was no less an eminent Example of all the Virtues and Graces that are proper to that State. Indeed, had he been always bred up in the School of Adversity, he could not have born his Afflictions better than he did. And this Consideration adds very much to the Excellence of his Example; because his Afflictions, as they were very grievous in themselves, so they were also highly aggravated by their succeeding to a State of the greatest Plenty and Prosperity. For it is no such great Matter for a poor Man to be contented, if he was always poor, and was bred up hardly from the Beginning; nor is it so much Commendation to a Man to bear any Affliction patiently, after he hath been a long while used to it: But the greatest Trial of a Man's Virtue, is in bearing well a great Change of his Condition for the worse; and when from Plenty he is reduced to Want, from great Prosperity to miserable Adversity, from the highest Honour to the vilest Disgrace; if then he acquits himself well, and bears this great Change of his Fortune with Meekness and Equanimity, he becomes an excellent Pattern to the World, of the most difficult and heroick Virtues.

Such therefore was that Prince whose Memory we now celebrate; who was exactly the same in all Conditions; and shewed himself, even at the first Trial, a perfect Master of all those Virtues which are suitable to an afflicted State, which others can scarcely learn after they have been long in it. Such was his Piety, that in every Thing that happened to him, he meekly resigned himself to the divine Will, and cheerfully submitted to whatever God was pleased to lay upon him, in a firm Belief that what God ordered was best. And such was his Charity, that he freely forgave the rude Insolencies and Affronts of his own Subjects; even of those who had been in a particular Manner highly obliged by him: And he not only forgave them himself, but prayed earnestly to God, to forgive them too.

And this humble and dutiful Behaviour towards God, under the severest Trials, and this Charitable and Christian Behaviour towards Men, under the greatest Provocations to Anger and Revenge, fully justified his Integrity, and perfected his Example; so that now, from the various Accidents both of Prosperity and Adversity, which befell him, and his Behaviour under them, all Men, in all Estates, may be instructed in the Duties of their Condition; and by the Pattern of such a great King, and such an excellent Man, may be encouraged to the Practice thereof. And if it had not happened to this just Man according to the Work of the Wicked, we should have wanted one
of

of the most excellent Examples of Piety and Virtue that ever the World produced.

And upon these Grounds, I suppose, it is, that the Church always celebrates the Memory of *Martyrs* with Joy and Gladness; nay, and keeps even the Days of their Martyrdom, as Festivals, not as Fasts; as Days of Rejoicing, not of Mourning, viz. partly, because of the great Advantage which the Church reaps from the Instruction and Encouragement of their Examples, who have suffered for the Truth's sake; and partly, because those Days on which they suffered the worst of Deaths, were even to them themselves, the best Days of their whole Life; the Days which did put a Period to all their Miseries, and give them Admittance to everlasting Joys. And therefore the ancient Church, called them not the Days of their Death or Martyrdom, but their *Birth-Days*; because they were then delivered out of an evil and troublesome World, and born again unto a new and endless Life of unspeakable Felicity; so that to them *the Day of their Death was*, in Truth, *much* Eccles. vii. 1. *better than the Day of their Birth.*

And upon both these Accounts, we also might very well celebrate this Day of the Martyrdom of our late pious and gracious Sovereign King CHARLES I. as his Birth-Day, and keep it as one of our highest Festivals, had he fallen, as the ancient Martyrs did, by the Hands of Infidels, or Strangers; or by any other Hands than our own. But this is our Unhappiness, and indeed a most just Cause of the bitterest Grief, and deepest Humiliation to us; that we can never think of his exemplary Piety and Goodness, without, at the same Time, reflecting upon our own great Wickedness; and that the more we admire his Virtues, the more we must condemn our selves, thro' whose Iniquity it thus happened to him.

For though the Justice of God may be easily cleared and vindicated in suffering the best of Men to be grievously afflicted, to be reviled and persecuted, and even to be barbarously murdered, by the Hands of the Wicked; though, I say, these Dispensations of Providence, so far as they are the Acts of Providence, are both just in themselves, and ordained to wise and good Ends; this will by no means serve to excuse those wicked Men, who are the Means and Instruments of the Afflictions of the Righteous; because every Act is to be judged of by it self, and not by the Effects which may follow from it, but are not the natural Consequences thereof. And if *we may not do Evil, that Good may come; and our Damnation is just*, if we do that which is evil, tho' we design Good by it; as the Apostle teaches, *Rom. iii. 8.* much less may we allow our selves to do Evil, only because God can bring Good out of it; and much more will our Damnation be just, if we do Evil with an evil Design, altho' God can turn our Injury into Good, to them to whom we meant it for Evil, or may otherwise so order it, that it shall produce very beneficial Effects to Mankind.

For who can think that the Persecutors of the Apostles and first Christians were the less to Blame, because God in his Wisdom so contrived it, that the Blood of the Martyrs became the Seed of the Church, and the most effectual Means of spreading Christianity in the World? Or who will go about to excuse from the greatest Sin that ever was committed, the Betrayers and Murderers of our Lord, because what they did, was what God himself had fore- Acts ii. 23.
iv. 28. ordained for the accomplishing the Redemption of Mankind?

And therefore, by the same Reason, altho' the Sufferings of our late martyred Sovereign did, without all Doubt, conduce much to his own spiritual Advantage, and to the increasing the Glory of his celestial Crown: And he, by his pious Deportment under them, became an excellent Example to all others who are, or shall be called to the like Sufferings; and while we consider these Advantages thereof, both to him and us, we may justly commemorate

Stat. 12 Car. II.
c. 30.

morate the same with Joy and Thankfulness; and might reasonably keep this as we do the Days of other Saints with Feasting and Rejoycing; yet when we consider, on the other Hand, who were the Means and Instruments of his Afflictions; this opens quite another Scene, and brings a black Cloud upon this most glorious Day, and justifies the Wisdom of that Authority which has commanded us to keep it in a quite different Manner; even with Weeping, and with Fasting, and with Mourning; because there is no Way to expiate a national Guilt, but by a national Repentance. For tho' it may charitably be believed, nay, tho' it be certainly true, that there was not an actual Consent of all the People, perhaps not of an hundredth Part of the People, even of that Generation, to this Act of great Wickedness and horrid Barbarity, *By which the Protestant Religion hath received the greatest Wound and Reproach, and the People of England the most insupportable Shame and Infamy*; yet when it is considered, that it was done by those, who had then, by the Help and Assistance of better meaning Men, attained to an uncontrollable Power, and that it was done *under the Name and Authority of a Parliament*; though the Party which called themselves so, and which passed the *Ordinance for erecting that prodigious and unheard of Tribunal, which they called, An High Court of Justice, for Tryal of His Majesty, were not a tenth Part of the whole*; and when it is farther considered, that a great many of those, who did not give an actual Consent thereto by their Voices, gave too great a Consent thereto by their Silence, and by their not endeavouring in Time to hinder it; the whole Nation, I fear, can hardly be thought guiltless.

Nay, and even we also who live now, so many Years after the Act is done, may yet be justly thought to give too great a Consent to it, and to be, in some Sort, Partakers with our Fathers, in the Guilt of shedding this righteous Blood; if we can speak of this villainous Act, or of the Preparations to it, without Abhorrence: Nay more, if we do not heartily grieve and mourn at the Remembrance thereof. For if you look into *Ezek. ix. 4, 5, 6.* you will see that even in the Judgment of God himself, they which do not mourn for the Sins of others, and especially for the publick Abominations that are done in the midst of the City or Nation to which they belong, are Partakers therein.

Exod. xxxiv. 7.

And besides, it may be also considered; that tho' we, who live now, were not any of us of the Number of those that were actually concerned in this villainous Act, of murdering the Lord's Anointed; being perhaps not then born, or not of competent Age to be concerned in such Matters; yet it is an usual Thing with God, and what he has expressly threatned, to *visit the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children, and upon the Childrens Children, unto the third, and to the fourth Generation*, And if he sometimes does this, for private and personal Sins; much more, may we reasonably think, he often does the same, for such Sins as are publick and national; because tho' one Generation passes away, and another comes, the Nation never dies; the Nation is still the same in this Age, that it was in the last, and will be the same in the next.

And this Threatning of God, I think, has been in some Measure verified upon us. For we have already felt many Stroaks of the divine Vengeance, as we have great Reason to believe, upon this very Account. It is reasonable, I say, to think this, because some of the Judgments which have befallen us since, have been the natural Effects and Products of this Day's Wickedness; for such, I think, we must all allow to be, those many Years of Anarchy and Confusion which immediately succeeded this bloody Tragedy; and also, to name no more, those dismal Fears and Apprehensions that we have since been in of Popery and arbitrary Power; occasioned, in

great Measure, by the Expulsion of the royal Seed and their Education in a foreign Country and Religion.

That these will be the last Expressions of God's Anger against us for this great Sin, we hope; but at the same Time, we have much greater Reason to fear they will not, so long as the same Wickednesses do abound which have drawn down those many heavy Judgments of God upon us, which we have already felt; and we can have no reasonable Assurance that we shall not be punished yet seven times more for our Iniquities, unless now by a sincere Repentance, and a thorough Reformation of our Lives, and an unfeigned Humiliation of our Souls, and an utter Detestation of all such villainous Practices for the future, we endeavour to appease the Anger of God, and to move him to Compassion towards us.

This then let us do; and then let us pray, as we are taught in our Litany, and we may reasonably hope God will hear our Prayer: *Remember not, Lord, our Offences, nor the Offences of our Fore-fathers; neither take thou Vengeance of our Sins: Spare us, good Lord, spare thy People, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious Blood; and be not angry with us for ever. Amen.*

JAMES II. 24.

To see then how that by Works a Man is justified and not by Faith only.

It was an usual Thing to take two Texts to a Sermon. I would subjoin to the Words which I have now read to you, those in Rom. iii. 28. or some other Text out of some of St. Paul's Epistles to the same Purpose. These I have concluded that a Man is justified by Faith; and I would read them both together, as the Theme or Subject whereon I intend to discourse at this Time.

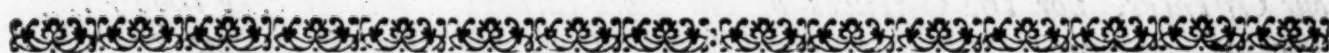


For this is my present Design; not to handle these Words of St. Paul, as if they were a single Text; but to lay down a Notion of Justification, as St. Paul teaches in this other Text: But as they differ in Words and Expression, I shall not do either both or neither, but I shall take in our Justification, by Faith only, as St. James here declares to be necessary neither of the one nor of the other, in asserting the Necessity of good Works to the Faith, and as the Effects of it, in order to anticipate more to the Words of St. Paul, and does. But before I proceed to show these two Apostles may, as I think, be fairly reconciled, it may not be amiss to premise this one Thing, even That if that Solution of this Difficulty, which I shall try and by propose, should not seem clear and satisfactory, and if we could not think of any other Way whereby these two divine Writers might be out of Application, be reconciled together, and made to speak the same Thing; it would never be reasonable to stick to the Words of St. James, in their first and most natural Signification, and to suppose that St. Paul is to be interpreted by him, rather than he by St. Paul; and consequently to take for granted, that the Doctrine, which we are here taught in these Words by St. James, that Works are necessary as well as Faith, to render us such as God will approve of, and justify, is the

DISCOURSE XCVIII.

St. Paul and St. James reconciled.

A Commencement Sermon.



JAMES II. 24.

*Ye see then how that by Works a Man is justified,
and not by Faith only.*



IF it was an usual Thing to take two Texts to a Sermon, I would subjoin to the Words, which I have now read to you, those in *Rom. iii. 28.* or some other Text out of some of St. Paul's Epistles to the same Purpose, *Therefore we conclude that a Man is justified by Faith*; and I would read them both together, as the Theme or Subject whereon I intend to discourse at this Time.

For this is indeed my present Design; not to handle these Words of St. James by themselves, that is, as laying down a Notion of Justification, to Appearance contrary to what St. Paul teaches in that other Text: But to shew that St. Paul and St. James, tho' they differ in Words and Expressions, do yet really both teach the same Doctrine; that neither doth St. Paul, in excluding *Works* from having any Thing to do in our *Justification*, mean to exclude such *Works* as St. James here declares to be necessary; neither on the other Side doth St. James, in asserting the Necessity of good *Works* together with *Faith*, and as the Effects of it, mean to attribute more to them than St. Paul does.

But before I proceed to shew how these two Apostles may, as I think, be fairly reconciled, it may not be amiss to premise this one Thing, *viz.*

That if that Solution of this Difficulty, which I shall by and by propose, should not seem clear and satisfactory, and if we could not think of any other Way whereby these two divine Writers might, to our Apprehension, be reconciled together, and made to speak the same Thing; it would nevertheless, in that Case, be reasonable to stick to the Words of St. James, in their strict and most natural Signification, and to suppose that St. Paul is to be interpreted by *him*, rather than *he* by St. Paul; and consequently to take for granted, that the Doctrine, which we are here taught in express Words by St. James, *viz.* that *Works* are necessary as well as *Faith*, to render us such as God will approve of and justify at the last Day,

Day, is undoubtedly true; altho' we could not tell, which Way St. Paul's Words might be fairly interpreted in the same Sense. This, I say, appears reasonable upon several Accounts. As namely,

1. Because we have an exprefs Testimony of Scripture, that in St. Paul's Writings *there are some Things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own Destruction.* And it is probable that those Places wherein he treats concerning Justification by Faith only, may be reckoned into that Number. And this St. Augustin says expressly; viz. *That the chief Difficulty of all in St. Paul's Epistles, is his so much Commendation of that Faith, which he says does justify; by which ignorant Men understanding nothing else but only an Assent of the Mind to the Truths of the Gospel, which indeed is the prime and most proper Notion of the Word, do thence infer, that a good Life is not necessary to justify and save a Man.* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

And indeed if St. Peter had not made this Observation concerning the Obscurity of some of St. Paul's Writings, it is nevertheless no more than what every one that reads the Bible must needs observe; viz. that the *Epistles* of St. Paul, especially where he handles Controversy, are the hardest to be understood, except perhaps the Prophecies that are not yet accomplished, of any Parts of the *New Testament*.

And on the other Side, it is no less obvious to be observed, that the *Epistle* of St. James, and this *Chapter* of it in particular, is, to Appearance, very plain and clear; and that, both in the Conclusion which it lays down, viz. *that we are justified by Works, and not by Faith only*, and also in the Arguments whereby this Conclusion is made good, from the fourteenth Verse of this Chapter to the End.

Now if the Case be thus, as it plainly seems to be, nothing can be more unreasonable than to interpret this Place of St. James by those of St. Paul, that is, a plain Place by an obscure one; and on the other Side, nothing can be fairer than when we meet with any crabbed or difficult Place in any Author, to see whether his Meaning be not elsewhere expressed more clearly; and if it be, to conclude that the intricate Place hath the same Meaning with the plain one, altho' we know not how well to reconcile the Words and Phrases thereof to it.

And this is the Case here; For tho' St. Paul and St. James were different Writers, yet the Author of both their *Epistles* was the same, viz. the Holy Spirit of God, by whose Inspiration they both wrote: Their Writings are consequently both of them Parts of that one everlasting Gospel, by which God will judge the World; and they do both of them contain, only in different Expressions, the Articles of the same Covenant between God and us. It is reasonable therefore in this Case, to observe the same Method that we do in other the like Cases, viz. to put such a Sense and Interpretation, on any difficult and ambiguous Passage that we meet with any where therein, as to make it agree to, and consist with, those other Passages in the same Book or Writing, which seem to be more plainly expressed, and of the Meaning of which there can be no Dispute.

2. Another Reason why I think, if we could not easily reconcile St. Paul with St. James, we ought rather to embrace the literal Sense of St. James, than that of St. Paul, and to conclude with him that good Works are necessary to our Justification and Salvation, as well as Faith, is; because, as is observed by several of the Ancients, this *Epistle* of St. James, as likewise the first of St. John, the second of St. Peter, and that of St. Jude, was written on purpose to rectify the Mistakes that some were fallen into through their Misunderstanding of some of St. Paul's Writings. Vide Grot. in Jam. ii. 14.

Now if this be so, we may reasonably conclude, that St. James designing this Discourse of his concerning Faith and Works as a Commentary upon,

or an Explication of what St. *Paul* had written before upon the same Subject, was very careful to avoid all that Obscurity and Ambiguity of Expression, which had occasioned the Writings of St. *Paul* to be so grossly misunderstood, and wrested to such ill Purposes, as St. *Peter* observes they had been by some ignorant and perverse Men; and consequently that St. *James* uses the Words *Faith* and *Works* in that Sense which is most natural and obvious, in that Sense wherein common Readers were most like to understand them: Whereas St. *Paul's Epistles*, I mean those wherein he handles this same Subject, being written with another Design, as I shall shew hereafter, it may well be supposed, that he, having in his writing them an Eye to his main Design, which was to shew the Necessity of embracing the Christian Faith, and the no Obligation that lay upon *Christians* from the ceremonial Law of *Moses*, was less cautious in his other Expressions, as not fearing that any Person, instructed in the Christian Religion, would ever so grossly misunderstand and pervert his Words, as to think that he intended to give Encouragement to a lewd and dissolute Life.

But this nevertheless some did think, at least they pleaded St. *Paul's* Authority for it; that if Men did but believe aright, it was no great Matter how they lived. Against these therefore our Apostle St. *James* sets himself in this Chapter, and shews at large that Christianity did not consist only in a true and orthodox *Faith*; that a bare Belief in *Christ*, or of the Truths of the Gospel, without bringing forth Fruits in our Life and Conversation, answerable to such a Belief, would be in no wise sufficient to justify or save us.

And that in writing this, he had an Eye to what St. *Paul* had written before upon the same Subject, is farther probable, because he makes use of that very Instance of *Abraham* to prove the Necessity of good *Works* together with *Faith*, which St. *Paul* had before brought against the *Jews*, to shew the Sufficiency of *Faith* alone without *Works*, that is, without those ceremonial Observances, which they would have pressed upon all other *Christians*, and which they laid more Stress upon, and did put more Confidence in, than in the weightier Matters of the Law, Justice, Mercy, and Fidelity.

This *Epistle* of St. *James* therefore being written after St. *Paul's Epistles*, and so very probably, with a Design to explain them where they had been misunderstood; it is reasonable to take for granted, that what St. *James* here plainly asserts, touching the Necessity of Good *Works* together with *Faith*, is the Sense of St. *Paul*, altho' we could not easily bring St. *Paul's* Words to it. Especially if it be considered farther in the third Place,

3. That tho' this *Epistle* of St. *James* had been never written; nay tho' there had not been one plain Text in the whole Bible expressly asserting the Insufficiency of a mere Belief, or of an empty fruitless *Faith*; yet we could not understand those Passages of St. *Paul*, wherein he so much magnifies *Faith*, and decries *Works*, in any other Sense than what St. *James* plainly teaches, without making those Passages in St. *Paul* to evacuate all the rest of the Bible, and to contradict the whole Design of the Gospel.

For there is never a Page, hardly a Verse in the whole Bible, wherein the Nature of that Covenant which God hath made with Mankind is spoken of, which doth not either in express Words, or by plain Consequence contradict and disprove that wild Notion of being saved only by a bare Belief, tho' we take no Care to lead our Lives suitably to our Belief.

Now this is the Method that we observe in the Reading of other Books; we consider the Scope and Design of the whole, and judge of the Sense of particular Passages with Reference to that: And if there be any single Passage which we apprehend not the Meaning of, or which, at the first Reading, seems to have another Meaning than is agreeable to the Author's main Design,

sign, we build nothing upon such a Passage, but wait a while to see if the Author will not elsewhere explain himself: And if he does not, and if at last we cannot discern how that Passage can, without somewhat straining the Words, be reconciled with others; we conclude however and take for granted, that the Author, if he appears to be a Person of Judgment, is consistent with himself, and consequently that in that Passage, however the Words of it may sound, he did not mean to thwart and contradict all the rest of his Book.

And this is the Case here. For the Design of our Saviour's coming into the World was to make Men holy; all that he did, and taught, and suffered, had a Tendency to effect this Design; and his whole Gospel is in a Manner made up of Precepts, and Exhortations, and Encouragements to Godliness and Virtue, and of severe Threatnings against all Manner of Sin. *The Wrath of God is, therein, revealed from Heaven, against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness.* These Things are plain and undeniable; this is manifestly the Scope and Design of the whole Bible; and therefore altho' some few Passages in St. Paul's Writings should, in their most obvious Meaning, seem to imply the contrary to this; it would be reasonable however, to believe and assert the indispensable Necessity of an holy Life, together with an orthodox Belief, rather than upon them alone to ground a Doctrine, which, if true, would plainly evacuate all the rest of the Bible, and perfectly thwart and contradict the whole Design of the Gospel.

And this I think a sure Ground for them to go upon, who have not Leisure to study the Point, or who after all their Study are not able clearly to discern how these two Apostles may be fairly reconciled in their seemingly contradictory Assertions; one saying, that *we are justified by Faith*, and the other, that *we are justified by Works, and not by Faith only*.

Which Difference nevertheless, I believe, it is not so hard a Matter to reconcile, as at the first Sight it may appear to be; the seeming Contrariety between them lying, as I suppose, only in their using in different Senses, the Words *justify*, *Faith*, and *Works*; every one of which Words is capable of, and is very often in Scripture used in different Senses. For,

I. As to the Word *justify*, not to trouble you with the Etymology of it, which is but an uncertain Way of knowing the common Acceptation of a Word; nor yet with the Sense which Heathen Writers have used the Word in, from whence we cannot with Certainty collect in what Sense the sacred Writers do use it; it may be sufficient to observe, that the most obvious and usual Signification thereof in holy Scripture, is, to receive to Mercy, to absolve and acquit from former Transgressions. When God justifies a Man, it is by forgiving him his Trespases, and accepting, esteeming, and rewarding him as a righteous Person, altho' he is not really and strictly such. And thus St. Paul himself seems to expound the Word, in *Rom. iii. 25. Being justified freely by his Grace, thro' the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation thro' Faith in his Blood; to declare his Righteousness for the Remission of Sins that are past, thro' the Forbearance of God.* In which Text, *being justified*, and *having our Sins remitted*, seem to be used as Terms of the same Signification. And the Psalmist, meaning to describe the Blessedness of a justified Person, thus expresses it: *Blessed are they whose Iniquities are forgiven, and whose Sins are covered; Blessed is the Man to whom the Lord will not impute Sin.* And indeed, this is all the *Justification* that *sinful Men*, and such all Men are, are capable of: For being in Truth Sinners, they cannot, by a just God, be acquitted as innocent; they can therefore be *justified* no other Way, but by having their Sins forgiven them,

*Psalm. xxxii. 1, 2.
Rom. iv. 5, 6,
7, 8.*

and by being received to Mercy; for if God should enter into strict Judgment with us, no Man living could be justified in his Sight, as the Psalmist says, Psalm cxliii. 2.

Rom. viii. 33. To justify therefore, in the common Scriptural-Notion of it, is, to absolve from Guilt, to discharge from Punishment; and accordingly it is frequently in Scripture opposed to Condemnation. It is God that justifieth, saith the Apostle, who is he that condemneth? and in another Place, being justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from Wrath, thro' him.
Rom. v. 9.

Now taking the Word in this Sense, there is a two-fold Justification.

First, When we take upon us the Profession of the Christian Religion in Baptism; for then our past Sins are forgiven us, then we are received into a Covenant of Grace and Pardon.

But this is not a full Justification; for our Sins are not then clearly pardoned and forgiven, because they may, after this, be still imputed to us; and so they will be, in Case we afterwards do either in Profession or in Works deny that Faith, which we then take upon us. Our second therefore, and our complete and final Justification, is not till the great Day of Judgment, when God will for ever acquit from the Guilt, and free from the Punishment of all their past Sins, all those who continued faithful to that Covenant, which they entered into with God at their Baptism.

Supposing therefore at present, that St. Paul and St. James do by Faith and Works both mean the same Things; yet if they do not both speak of the same Justification; if St. Paul, when he speaks of Justification by Faith, means the first Justification, which is dispensed to us in Baptism; and St. James, when he affirms that we are justified by Works, and not by Faith only, means the second and final Justification at the last Day; there is plainly no Manner of Contrariety between them. For it may be true, that in order to our being admitted into the Covenant of Justification and Pardon nothing more may be required, but only that we firmly believe and embrace the Christian Religion; and accordingly we may observe, that as a previous Disposition to Baptism nothing else seems to be required, but only that we should believe the Gospel, and in Profession renounce our former Sins, according to that of St. Philip to the Eunuch, Acts viii. 37. If thou believest with all thine Heart, thou mayst be baptised: And yet it may be true too, that our being put into a justified State by Baptism, will in the Event be no Advantage to us, but rather only increase our Condemnation, unless afterwards we continue true and faithful to that Profession which we then take upon us, and are careful to perform our Part of that Covenant which we then enter into with God. Now, I say, this last seems to be what St. James affirms, and the first all that St. Paul teaches, at least in many of those Places, where he says, we are justified by Faith.

For that by the Justification which St. James speaks of, when he says we are justified by Works, and not by Faith only, he means our final Justification at the great Day, upon which that Salvation will immediately be bestowed upon us, which at our Baptism was only promised, and assured to us upon certain Conditions, is evident, by his using Justification and Salvation, in this Dispute, as Terms equivalent. For thus he expresses the Doctrine of the Text, in the fourteenth Verse, where he first begins to handle the Subject; What does it profit, my Brethren, if a Man say he hath Faith, and have not Works? can Faith save him? It is plain that he means the same Thing there by being saved, that he does in the Text and other Verses of this Chapter, by being justified; and consequently that by Justification, in this Discourse of his concerning Faith and Works, he means that final Justification, upon which Salvation is immediately consequent.

And on the other Side, that St. Paul in very many at least, if not in all those Places wherein he attributes *Justification* to *Faith* only without *Works*, means thereby only our *first Justification*, that is, our being admitted into the Covenant of Grace, and being put into a *justified State* by *Baptism*, will, I suppose, be no less evident, if these two Things be considered.

1. That in many Places he speaks of *Justification* as a Thing *past*, which he could not do if he had meant the same Thing by *Justification* that St. James does. For thus writing to the *Corinthians*, he says, 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Ye are*, or ye have been *justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus*: And Rom. vi. 1. speaking of himself and other *Christians* that were then living, and consequently not *finally justified* in St. James's Use of the Word, he says, that *being justified by Faith they had Peace with God*. And upon this he grounds their Hope, that they should also, if they continued in Faith, be *finally justified* by God at the last Day, Verse 9. *For if while we were Sinners Christ died for us, much more then, being now justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from Wrath thro' him*.

2. It may be also farther observed, that in many Places he expressly joins *Justification* with *Baptism*, as an Effect or Concomitant of it; as in Tit. iii. 5, 7. *Not by Works of Righteousness which we have done, but according to his Mercy he saved us by the washing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, that being justified by his Grace, we should be made Heirs according to the Hope of eternal Life*; and in 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified*; they were *justified*, it seems, at the same Time that they were *washed*, that is, at their *Baptism*, when they openly and solemnly renounced those wicked Works which they had formerly lived in, and took upon them the Profession of the Christian Faith.

Now therefore, if this be granted, which seems to be very probable, that St. Paul generally means this by *Justification*, viz. only our being admitted into a State of Grace and Favour with God, at our *Baptism*, in which State if we continue by persevering in Faith and Obedience, we shall at last be *justified* and acquitted *finally* in the great Judgment; it will be easy to understand all those Places wherein he attributes this to *Faith* only, in a Sense very agreeable to the Doctrine which St. James here teaches. It will be easy then to understand what St. Paul means, Rom. iv. 5. where he says, that God *justifies the ungodly*; then I say, that Passage which hath been thought the strongest, will appear to be no Objection at all against St. James's Doctrine; the Meaning thereof being only this, that the Grace of God in *Christ Jesus* is so large, as that he does not refuse even the vilest and greatest Sinners, but readily accepts them to Favour, upon their Belief of the Gospel, and closing with the Terms of it: And there will be then no Difficulty at all in understanding how *Abraham* was *justified* by *Faith* only, according to St. Paul, and how he was *justified* by *Works*, that is, not by *Faith* only, as St. James expressly affirms he was, at the twenty first Verse of this Chapter. For the Case was thus. Upon his giving a full and hearty Assent to the Truth of the divine Promises, he was immediately received into God's Favour and Acceptance, even before the Sincerity of his Faith had been actually tried by his Obedience: *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for Righteousness*, Rom. iv. 3. so that he was *then* in a *justified State*; and yet if after this he had declined to leave his Country and his Father's House, or even to sacrifice his Son at God's Command, he would by this Disobedience have fallen from that State of divine Favour, and not have been *finally justified* by God; but then all his former, as well as his later Sins, which had been once remitted to him, with a temporary and conditional Remission, upon his first entering into the Covenant of Grace,

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by *Faith*; by Virtue of which Remission, he was, while he continued in the Covenant, a *justified* Person; would nevertheless have been imputed to him, and he condemned for them, if he had swerved from his Obedience.

In short therefore, the *Justification* which St. Paul generally speaks of, is *that* whereby we are made *Heirs of Salvation*, as he himself explains it in the aforecited Text, *Tit. iii. 7. That being justified by Grace we should be made Heirs, according to the Hope of eternal Life*: But the *Justification* which St. James speaks of, is that by which we are actually *admitted* into the *Possession* of this Inheritance. And therefore, tho' in order to the *first Justification* nothing more be necessary, but only that we close with, and accept of those Terms of Reconciliation, which God offers to us: Yet in order to the *second Justification*, it is moreover necessary that we should stand to, and perform those Terms; that we should make good that Covenant which we before entred into; or else, though we are *now* already *justified* in St. Paul's Sense, that is, are now already by our embracing and believing and professing the Gospel, in such a Capacity and Likelihood of obtaining eternal Life, as an *Heir* is of enjoying his Father's Estate; we shall never be *justified*, in St. James's Sense, that is, we shall never actually possess and enjoy the Estate, but notwithstanding our present Heirship, shall at last be cast off, and disinherited for our Disobedience.

And this Observation concerning the different Senses, wherein these two *Apostles* do sometimes use the Word *justify*, may, I suppose, be alone sufficient to reconcile them in most, if not in all those Passages wherein they seem to differ. But,

II. The Word *Faith* or *Belief*, which they do both use in treating of this Subject, is likewise a Word capable of, and frequently in Scripture used in different Senses; and I believe it may easily be made appear, that in those Places wherein St. Paul attributes so much to *Faith*, wherein he is thought to declare that *that* is the *only Condition* of our *final Justification*, and Admittance into the Possession of the promised Inheritance, he means quite another Thing by *Faith* than St. James does, when he says that *that alone is not sufficient*, even all that St. James means by *Faith* and *Works* too.

I will not trouble you now with all the Significations, in which the Word *Faith* or *Belief* is used in holy Scripture; but shall take notice only of two, which I suppose most applicable to the Case in Hand.

1. The *first* Sense of it which I shall take notice of, is that which indeed is the most obvious and proper Meaning of the Word; that is, when by *Faith* is meant, *an Assent of the Mind to the Truth of some revealed Proposition*. And in this Sense St. James uses the Word: By that *Faith*, which being without *Works*, he says, is not sufficient to justify or save us, he plainly means nothing more than only a *Belief* of those Truths, which are revealed in the Gospel. And the Case that he puts, is this, that a Man believes there is a God, and that those Things which he has revealed are true, and that all his Promises and Threatnings shall be made good, but nevertheless takes no Care to live well; and in this Case he says, that such a *Faith* as this is an *empty dead Faith*, and that it will be of no real Advantage to us, any more than it is to the Devils, who believe all these Truths as firmly as we can do, but without any Benefit to themselves, because the Promises being not made to them, they are not thereby incited to the doing of Good.

But the Promises are made to us; and therefore it can hardly be conceived, it is scarcely to be supposed that any Man that firmly believes all the Truths of the Gospel, and considers his own Interest therein, should nevertheless allow himself in a wicked Life. *Faith* is naturally such an active,

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lively and working Principle, that it can hardly fail to shew it self by its Effects.

2. And for this Reason, *secondly*, the Word *Faith*, which most properly signifies nothing but the Cause or Principle, is oftentimes in Scripture put to signify both the Cause and the Effect too, that is, both a Belief of the Gospel-Truths, and also a Life led answerably to such a Belief.

And in this large and comprehensive Sense it is clearly evident that St. Paul does use the Word in diverse Places, and especially in those Epistles where he treats of *Justification* by *Faith*, as may appear from his oftentimes using other Words and Phrases instead of the single Word *Faith*. For what he sometimes calls *Faith*, he at other Times in those same Epistles, calls *the Law of Faith*, and *the Obedience of Faith*: And in *Rom. x. 16.* *Rom. iii. 27.* he most clearly explains his own Meaning to be, to include and comprehend *i. 5. xvi. 26.* Obedience in the Word *Faith*, whenever he attributes so much to *Faith*: But they have not all obeyed the Gospel; for *Esaias* saith, Lord, who hath believed our Report? In which Words the same Thing is plainly meant by obeying the Gospel, and believing the Report of the Preachers of it; from whence it clearly appears, that the *Faith* or *Belief* which he so much magnifies in that Epistle, is not an idle ineffectual Belief, but such a *Faith* as makes Men to be obedient.

Forasmuch therefore as the *Faith*, which St. Paul speaks of, when he says we are justified by *Faith*, includes in it all that St. James means by *Faith* and *Works* too; it is plain, that tho' we suppose that they do both use the Word *justify* always in the same Sense, there is not however any Contrariety in their Doctrines, altho' one says, that we are justified by *Faith*, and the other, that we are justified by *Works*, and not by *Faith* only. But,

III. There is also an Ambiguity in the Word *Works*; and it is not improbable, nay I suppose I shall make it very plain, that these two Apostles St. Paul and St. James, in their several Discourses upon *Justification*, do likewise use this Word in very different Senses; and that St. Paul, when he excludes *Works*, does not mean the same by *Works* that St. James does when he affirms that we are justified by *Works*, and not by *Faith* only.

And if St. James, by *Works*, when he affirms them to be necessary together with *Faith*, means those Works of Piety, Justice, and Charity, and other moral Duties which are required in the Gospel; as to any one that reads the former Part of the Chapter it will be evident that he does; and on the other Side, if St. Paul, when he excludes *Works*, means by *Works*, only either those materially good Works, which Men might do without the Grace of the Gospel, or the Merit of good Works, or else those ritual Observances which were required by the ceremonial Law of *Moses*; then, though their Words and Expressions be different, yet their Sense may be the very same.

Now concerning this Place in St. James, I think there can be no Dispute; he plainly takes both *Faith* and *Works* in the most proper and usual Acceptation of the Words: By *Faith*, when he affirms that Faith alone is not sufficient, he plainly means a mere Belief of the Truths of the Gospel; and by *Works*, when he affirms that they are necessary together with Faith, he plainly means such a Sort of Life and Conversation, as the Belief of the Gospel Truths is naturally apt to produce, a Conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ: And both these he affirms to be necessary, in order to our final Justification at the last Day.

And on the other Side, St. Paul, if at any Time he speaks of the same *Justification* that St. James does, means by *Faith*, when he says we are justified by that only, all that St. James means by *Faith* and *Works* too, as

hath been shewn already ; and by *Works*, when he says we are justified without Works, he means only, either the *Merit* of good Works, or *such Works*, as might be done by unregenerate Men without the Grace of the Gospel, or else the *ritual Observances* of the Mosaical Law.

And that he uses the Words in these Senses, and does not mean to exclude from being a Condition of our final Justification, that hearty Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel which a firm Belief of the Truths of it is naturally apt to produce, will farther appear, if these two Things be considered: 1. The *Occasion* and *Design* of those Discourses of St. Paul, wherein *Faith* is so much magnified, and *Works* are set so light by: And, 2. The several *Cautions* that are here and there intermixed in those Discourses, as it were on Purpose to prevent our mistaking his Meaning, and thinking that we may be saved by Faith alone, without a good Life.

1. We may consider the *Occasion* and *Design* of those Discourses of St. Paul, wherein *Faith* is so much magnified, and *Works* are set so light by; and which consequently do seem most to contradict the Doctrine here taught by St. James.

Heb. vi. 1.

Mat. xxviii. 20.

And I premise this first of all; that none of St. Paul's Epistles seem to have been written as if they were intended to comprehend the whole Christian Religion; they rather suppose Christianity already planted in those Places, to which his Epistles are directed: It was not consequently his Intention, in every Epistle that he wrote, to teach all the *Principles of the Doctrine of Christ*, and to lay again the Foundation of Repentance from dead Works, and of Faith towards God; for all this had been done before; those same Apostles, by whose Ministry they had been converted and baptised, having also then, according to the Commission given them by Christ, taught them to observe all Things whatsoever our Lord had commanded. As such therefore the Apostle considered the Persons to whom he wrote, viz. as true Disciples of Christ, as Persons that had before been taught to obey as well as believe the Gospel; and so had no Fear upon him, that by his using the Word *Faith* or *Works* in an uncommon Sense, and yet in such a Sense as the Controversy he was handling led him to use them in, they to whom he wrote would ever be in Danger of embracing an Opinion so contrary to the first Principles of the Christian Religion, as it plainly was, to think that they might be saved only by believing, without obeying the Gospel.

The main Design then, I say, of most of St. Paul's Epistles, I mean of the controversial Parts of them, seems to be to furnish the *Christians* to whom he wrote, with Answers to those Objections, which the Enemies to Christianity, among whom they lived, did make against it. And most of the Churches to which his Epistles are directed, were made up chiefly of *Gentile-Converts*, with whom nevertheless there were some *Jewish-Converts* also intermixed; but the far greatest Part of the *Inhabitants* of those Places were professed *Jews* or *Gentiles*, who, tho' both zealous, each for their own Way, and against each other, yet readily joined their Forces together, as against a common Enemy, to hinder the Growth and Spreading of Christianity.

So that St. Paul had three Sorts of Adversaries to deal with, viz. the *Gentiles*, the *Jews*, and the *Judaizing Christians*.

(1.) The *Gentiles*; who had been long bred up under the Institution of their Philosophers, and by their good and wholesome Precepts of Morality, were in a good Readiness and Disposition to embrace the Gospel; which, in general, commanded little more than they were taught before by their own Philosophers, only requiring a stricter and more perfect Observance of those Rules, and adding new Motives and Encouragements to it, from the plain Revelation of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, of which, before

the coming of *Christ*, Men had but an obscure Notion, and very slender Assurance.

The main Objection therefore which these had to make against *St. Paul*, was, that he took, as they thought, a great deal of Pains to little Purpose, in going about to establish a *new Belief* and a *new Profession* of *Religion* among them; seeing that as to Practice, they had been taught all the same Things in Substance by their own Philosophers; so that consequently they thought he might have spared his Labour. They were of the Mind of our modern *Deists*, that natural Religion was so good and perfect, that it needed no Revelation to improve it.

Against *these* therefore, the *Apostle* proves the Necessity of the *Christian Dispensation*, and of *Faith* in *Christ*, because though Men had been taught well before, they had never practised as they had been taught; that by Reason of the Weakness of human Nature, they had never lived up to what they knew was their Duty; that therefore no Man ever was or could be justified in God's Sight, by the Law of Nature, or the first Covenant made with Mankind, which required strict and unsinning Obedience; that consequently it was necessary to believe in *Christ*, and to enter into that more gracious Covenant, which he by his Blood had made between God and us; whereby he had encouraged good Works with better Promises, and offered to afford us divine Strength and Succour to assist our Endeavours: By which Covenant of Grace in *Christ*, though indeed we were still obliged to the same Duties which the Law of Nature had laid upon us, we might be justified, which by the other we could not be; because *that* required strict and unsinning Obedience, whereas *this* made Allowance for the Weakness of human Nature, and left Room for Repentance, if at any Time through Carelessness or Surprise we should come short of our Duty. And to shew the Advantage of this Covenant made by *Christ*, and the Impossibility of being justified any other Way than by having our Sins remitted to us through Faith in his Blood, seems to have been mainly designed by the *Apostle*, in the former Part of his *Epistle* to the *Romans*.

Now the first Covenant made with Mankind being indeed a Covenant of *Works*, without Grace, therefore in Opposition to, and to distinguish *this* from *that*, he, with good Reason, calls *this*, sometimes *Grace*, sometimes the *Law of Faith*, sometimes the *Preaching of Faith*, and sometimes barely *Faith*; which he says is the only Way by which it is possible for us to be justified, because our Nature is so corrupt and degenerate, that we cannot perform perfect and unsinning Obedience. But,

(2.) The *Jews* were also as conceited of themselves as the *Gentiles*, and as unwilling to accept of the Covenant made by *Christ*, because they trusted to be saved by the Observation of the Law of *Moses*.

And therefore the *Apostle* likewise, against *these*, endeavours to shew that *they* were Sinners as well as the *Gentiles*, and stood in as much Need of a Saviour as they. And this he does in the four or five first *Chapters* of his *Epistle* to the *Romans*; in some Passages of which, especially in the first and second *Chapters*, he seems to have a peculiar Respect to the *Gentiles*; and in other Places to the *Jews* more especially, and in some to both of them.

And the Sum of his Argument is this; That since all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles* had sinned, and come short of the Glory of God, it was therefore necessary that a *Redeemer* should come to make Atonement for their past Sins, and to establish a new Covenant between God and Men; which he calls *Faith*, or the *Law of Faith*, to distinguish it from the *Law of Moses*, which was truly a *Law of Works*; and by this Covenant of *Grace* or *Faith* in *Christ*, which was open and free for all to enter into, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*,

Gentiles, he says, might be justified, which they could not either of them be by the Law of Works, nor the *Jews* any more than the *Gentiles* by the ceremonial Law of *Moses*; that being never designed by God as a Condition of Justification, as having only temporal Rewards and Punishments annexed to it.

Seeing therefore the *Jews* as well as the *Gentiles* had broken the first Law given to Mankind, which required unsinning Obedience; he says, there was no Means of Justification now left for either of them, but by *Faith* in *Christ*, that is, by coming into that new Covenant which *Christ* had established by his Death, and offered to us in the Gospel. But,

(3.) Besides these two, the Apostle had also a *third* Sort of Adversaries to deal with, which did cost him as much Trouble as either of the former; and they were some who being born and bred *Jews*, had been converted to Christianity by the preaching of the *Apostles*, but nevertheless still retained such a great Liking and Veneration for *Moses* and his Law, that they thought they were yet bound to observe it as much as ever: And not only so, but they would fain have forced the same upon the *Gentiles* too, telling them, that notwithstanding *Christ*, they were bound to be circumcised as the *Jews* were, and to keep the Law of *Moses*, and that otherwise they could not be saved.

Against these therefore, the *Apostle* proves at large, especially in his Epistle to the *Galatians*, that the Law given by *Moses* was never designed to oblige the *Gentiles*, nor the *Jews* neither any longer than till the coming of *Christ*; that that Law was, to the *Jews* themselves, only a *School-master* to bring them unto *Christ*, that is, to prepare and dispose them to receive his most pure and heavenly Doctrine; that therefore now, after the Revelation and preaching of the Gospel, that Law was of no farther Use: After that *Faith* is come, says he, that is, after the Gospel is preached, we are no longer under a *School-master*, Galat. iii. 25. That the ceremonial Law was made up only of Types and Shadows, whereof *Christ* was the Substance, and that therefore the Substance being now come, they were to cease; that the ceremonial Law was given only to exercise the *Jewish Nation* for some Time, and was then to give Way to a better Law, the Law of *Faith* or *Evangelical Obedience*; that *Abraham* himself was justified by the same Means and Method which is now propounded in the Gospel, viz. by a lively *Faith* in the Promises of God, working in him a ready Obedience to whatsoever God required of him; and that he was thus justified before he was circumcised, and therefore so might they be too, without Circumcision, and such other ritual Observances.

In the Management of which Dispute with the *Judaizing Christians*, the *Apostle* calls the Christian Religion, as opposed to the Jewish, by the Word *Faith*, to distinguish it from the Observation of *Moses's* Law, which was called *Works*, or the *Works* of the Law. And using the Word in this Sense, he says, we are justified by *Faith*, and by *Faith* only, that is, by the *Faith* and Obedience of the Gospel; and that there is no Need at all of *Works*, that is, of such *Works* as were enjoined by the Ceremonial Law, which they laid such great Stress upon; for thus he often explains himself, expressly calling those *Works* which he rejects, the *Works* of the Law, thereby plainly distinguishing them from *Works* of *Evangelical Obedience*, and clearly intimating that it was not his Intention to exclude these, tho' he did those.

Thus the *Apostle* managed the Controversy he was engaged in with these three *Adversaries*: And that his main Design was to oppose one or other of them in all those Places, wherein those Passages are found which so much magnify *Faith*, and vilify *Works*, which are especially the *Epistles* to the

the *Romans* and *Galatians*, will, I suppose, readily appear to any one that shall attentively read them over; and I think it will be impossible to make out the Context, or to shew how those Places do at all tend to the carrying on these Designs, if we take the Words *Faith* and *Works* in any other Sense than I have before said St. Paul does use them in.

2. But, *secondly*, That the Apostle St. Paul did not intend to exclude such good *Works* as St. James here requires, *viz.* Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel, from being necessary to our final Justification at the great Day, will yet farther and more plainly appear; if in reading over those *Epistles*, we do but observe the several *Cautions* that are here and there intermixed, as it were on purpose to prevent our putting such an Interpretation upon his Words.

And first in the Epistle to the *Romans*, in Chap. ii. Ver. 6. he tells us plainly, that *God will render to every Man according to his Works, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil; and Glory, Honour and Peace, to every Man that worketh Good*: Which Passage would be very oddly put in, in a Discourse wherein he was proving the Sufficiency of *Faith* alone for Justification, if thereby he had meant such a *Faith* as might be without good *Works*.

But in the thirteenth Verse of that Chapter he contradicts that Opinion most expressly: *Not the Hearers of the Law, says he, shall be just before God, but the Doers of the Law shall be justified*. It seems then that St. Paul's Justification by *Faith* only, was not a Justification without *Works*; the *Faith*, that he there speaks of, must needs therefore be such a *Faith* as includes *Works* in it: *The Doers of the Law shall be justified*.

And so again, in the third Chapter, at the twenty first Verse, after he had said that both the Circumcision and Uncircumcision must be justified by *Faith*, and that they could not be justified any other Way; that they might not take *Faith* in such a narrow Sense as to exclude good *Works*, he adds, *Do we then make void the Law thro' Faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the Law*.

And to the same Purpose again, and in the fourth Chapter and first Verse, *What shall we say then? shall we continue in Sin that Grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to Sin live any longer therein?* And again, Ver. 15. *What then? shall we Sin, because we are not under the Law, but under Grace? God forbid*.

And lastly, to name no more, in the eighth Chapter of that Epistle, Ver. 1. when he was come to the Conclusion of this Controversy, having shewn at large the Insufficiency of all other Ways, and the absolute Necessity of accepting the Gospel-Truths, in order to Justification, he goes on to shew the Blessedness of those who believed in *Christ*, in these Words; *There is therefore now no Condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*: But then, lest they should mistake him, and think that a bare Belief in *Christ*, or the Profession of his Religion only, was enough to entitle them to this Blessedness, he adds, *who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit*.

The like Care he has also taken in his Epistle to the *Galatians*, where he handles this Controversy again, with a special Respect to the Jewish Law; where we may observe, that to prevent all Misunderstanding of what he had delivered touching the Sufficiency of *Faith* without *Works*, he takes frequent Occasion to declare his Meaning to be, only to exclude the *Works* of the Law, not the Obedience of the Gospel.

Particularly in the two last Chapters he is very large in explaining what Kind of *Liberty* he had been before pleading for: *Stand fast therefore, says he, in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again*

with the Token of Bondage, Gal. v. 1. And what Bondage he meant, appears in the next Verse, *Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing*; that is: If you still trust to be saved by your Jewish Observances, you disclaim and renounce the Covenant which Christ hath made for you, and so can expect no Benefit from it. *Whosoever of you, says he, are justified, that is, hope to be justified, by the Law, ye are fallen from Grace. For we, thro' the Spirit, wait for the Hope of Righteousness, by Faith*; that is, we Christians, no less than you Jews, do wait for the Hope of Righteousness, that is, for a Reward of our Righteousness: But then it is not such a Righteousness as yours, a Righteousness consisting in the Observation of Rites and Ceremonies, but thro' the Spirit, that is, by a spiritual Righteousness; and it is by Faith, that is, it is such a Righteousness as is wrought in us by Faith, that is, by our Belief of the Gospel of Christ. For, says he, Ver. 6. *In Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith*; not any Faith, but Faith which worketh by Love, or Faith which is made perfect by Love. Which Words he repeats again in Chap. vi. Ver. 15. only instead of Faith putting in another Word, not so ambiguous: *In Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature*. And the same Apostle in another parallel Place, in another of his Epistles, puts it out of all Doubt what he means in the first of these Places, by Faith, when he expresses the same by Obedience: *Circumcision is nothing, and Uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the Commandments of God*, 1 Cor. vii. 19.

And now by all that hath been said, I suppose, it sufficiently appears, that by Faith St. Paul means something more than only a bare Belief of the Gospel-Truths, when he makes it the sole Condition of Justification; and that by Works, he does not mean Works of Evangelical Obedience, when he excludes them from being necessary in order to it: So that St. Paul does not, any more than St. James, exclude such good Works, as are the natural Effects of a true, lively, and Christian Faith, from being necessary together with Faith, in order to our full and final Justification at the last Day.

And from all that hath been said, I think it appears, that St. Paul and St. James agree very well together; which was the Point that I proposed to make good. St. James indeed says here, that Faith alone, or a bare Belief of the Gospel, will not do without Works answerable to our Belief; *Ye see, how that by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only*: St. Paul, on the other Side, says, that *we are justified by Faith*: But tho' his Manner of Expression be different from, and, in the Letter, seemingly contradictory to St. James's, his Meaning is plainly the same. He affirms indeed, that we are justified by Faith: But then, as I have shewn, he means the same Thing by Faith, that St. James does by Faith and Works too; he means such a Faith as Abraham's was, for that is his Example as well as St. James's; he means such a Faith as however it is tried, approves it self by a ready Obedience, as Abraham's did: And the Works which he rejects as *useless* and *unnecessary*, or as not *sufficient*, are not such as Abraham's were, the Fruits of a lively Faith; but either mere ritual Observances, or else such Works, as tho' materially good, are not done out of a good and virtuous Principle. In a Word, he opposes Faith, his justifying and saving Faith, not to Evangelical Obedience, but either to *unfavouring* Obedience, by which none can be justified, because all are Sinners; or to an Opinion of Merit, which there can never be any Ground for; or, lastly, to the Rites and Ceremonies of Moses's Law, which Law, he shews, was not then obliging, and so could not be the Condition of Justification.

The Use we should make of what hath been said upon this Subject, is this; we should be hereby incited to the diligent Performance of that whole Condition, that according to the Doctrine taught by both these Apostles is required of

us in order to Salvation; which is, not only to believe in *Christ*, and to make Profession of the Christian Faith, but likewise to live as becomes the Gospel of *Christ*, and to bring forth plenteously all the Fruits of Righteousness.

And this likewise St. Peter teaches, in his second *Epistle*, i. 5, &c. with whose Words I shall conclude; *Besides this, giving all Diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, brotherly Kindness; and to brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these Things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these Things, is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old Sins. Wherefore the rather, Brethren, give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure: For if ye do these Things, ye shall never fall: For so an Entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Which God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the Sake of the same our Lord *Jesus Christ*; to whom, &c.



DISCOURSE XCIX.

Uncharitable Judgment reprov'd.

Preached on the Fast Day for the Storm,
Jan. 19. 1703.

LUKE XIII. 4, 5.

*Or those eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem?
I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*



THE Occasion of these Words you may see at the first Verse of this Chapter: *There were present at that Season, some that told our Saviour of the Galileans, whose Blood Pilate had mingled with their Sacrifices*; that is, as this Story is made up by the probable Conjecture of learned Men, who coming to *Jerusalem* at the Passover, and being known or suspected by *Pilate* to have been some of the Followers of that *Judas*, spoken of by *Gamaliel*, who had maintained, that it was not lawful for the *Jews*, being *Abraham's* Seed, to whom God had given the Land of *Canaan*, to pay Tribute to the *Roman Emperor*, and thereby acknowledge Subjection to a foreign Power; were set upon by *Pilate* in the very Temple, and slain by him while they were offering their Sacrifices; by which Means their own Blood became mingled with the Blood of their Sacrifices.

Now with what Design this Story was told to *our Saviour*, is uncertain; whether only as a Piece of News, or to shew the bloody Temper of *Pilate*, or to engage him to declare his Opinion concerning the Cause for which the *Galileans* suffered, or whether perhaps for some other Reason, which we now cannot so much as guess at; but he from thence takes Occasion to reprove and condemn, what was, it is likely, then a common Practice among them; what is, I am sure, too common a Practice among us, *viz.* the censuring and

and judging as Reprobates and vile Sinners, all such as fall under any remarkable Calamity, or are taken off by a violent or untimely Death. *And Luke xiii. 2. Jesus answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, Nay.*

And then, that this Saying of his might not be understood as meant to be restrained only to that one Case; he himself mentions another of like Nature, which, it seems, had then lately happened in *Jerusalem*, of *eighteen that had been killed by the Fall of a Tower upon their Heads*; and who, as it also seems, had upon this Account undergone the like uncharitable Censure: *Think ye, says our Saviour, in the Text, that they were Sinners above all Men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

For the better understanding of which Words, and of the Doctrine which we are therein taught, we may observe;

1. That our *Saviour* here does not in the least discommend, much less does he forbid the attributing particular Events to God's Disposition and Providence; whether they are effected and brought about by the Malice and Wickedness of Men, as was the Slaughter of the *Galileans* by *Pilate*; or by the Efficacy of natural Causes, as was the Death of those eighteen upon whom the Tower in *Siloam* fell; or by any other Means, or immediate Cause whatsoever. He does not in the least intimate, that it was besides, or without the Knowledge and Disposition of God, that the *Galileans* were so slaughtered by *Pilate*; or that the Fall of the Tower upon those eighteen here spoken of, was nothing else but Chance, or evil Accident. Nay, the contrary to this, he has in other Places of his holy Gospel plainly taught, *viz.* that no Evil does ever befall us, but either by the special Order, Direction, and Working of Providence; or by a limited Power granted by God to other Causes, upon some special Occasion; such as in the Case of *Job* he gave to *Satan*, *Job i. 12.* first over his *Estate*, with an Exception of his *Person*; and afterwards over—*ii. 6.* his *Body*, to afflict, but not to destroy it. For our Lord has told us, that *even the Hairs of our Head are all numbred*; that the Care of God's Pro- *Matth. x. 30.* vidence extends even to the *Grass of the Field*, and to the *Fowls of the Air*; —*vi. 26, 28.* that *not so much as a Sparrow falls to the Ground without God*, and there- —*x. 29.* fore much less a *Man*, who is of *more Value than many Sparrows*. *Ver. 31.*

We may therefore, nay we ought, in all particular Events that befall our selves or other Men, to see and acknowledge the Hand and Providence of God; we may say, that *it is his Work, and that his Hand has done it*. Only what we ought to forbear, is, the pretending to give an Account of the Reasons of the divine Administrations, to say why God has done this, or why God has done that; why he gave the *Galileans* into the Power of *Pilate*, or why he was pleased to destroy these eighteen by the Fall of a Tower upon their Heads: For these Things we cannot certainly know without special Revelation, because the Ways and Counsels of God are unsearchable; we ought not therefore to pretend to know them; we do foolishly and rashly, when we offer to give our Judgment concerning them.

2. It may be farther observed, that our *Saviour* does not here deny, but that the eighteen spoken of in the Text, and likewise the *Galileans* that had been before spoken of, were Sinners, and consequently well deserved the Calamities that had befallen them; he only denies that they were greater Sinners than many others were whom the like evil Accidents had not befallen: *Suppose ye that they were Sinners above all the Galileans? or think ye that these were Sinners above all that dwell in Jerusalem, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, Nay.*

Altho' therefore, we may say in general, that all temporal Judgments are the Expressions of God's Displeasure against Sin; we cannot take upon us to say with Certainty, what Sins, or, whose Sins in particular they were that drew down the Judgment. And if one Man be stricken, and another Man escapes, we cannot say that he that was stricken was a worse Man than he that escaped: We cannot say that his being so stricken is an Argument that God was more highly displeased with him than he is with others who live to a good old Age, and at last die peaceably in their Beds; we ought not to conclude, that he is now in a bad Condition in the other World, because he fared so ill in this; we should not deem our selves the Favourites of Heaven, or imagine our selves more righteous than our Neighbours, because we escaped better than they. But rather the Examples of God's seeming Severity on others should put us upon examining and reforming our Lives; otherwise our own present Escape will be only a temporary Reprieve, and what we flatter our selves is an Impunity, will be only a Reservation of us for a greater Vengeance. *Behold, says the Apostle, the Goodness and Severity of God: on them which fell, Severity; but towards thee, Goodness, if thou continue in his Goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.* And, *Suppose ye, says our Saviour, that these were Sinners above others, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish:* Ye shall likewise perish; that is, either by that or some other, perhaps by a much worse Calamity; or if ye are not thus corrected and punished in this World, ye will for that Reason be more surely condemned in the next.

In discoursing on these Words, I shall therefore do these two Things:

I. I shall shew, that it is a very unwarrantable and uncertain Judgment, which we make of any Man from the Evils that befall him in this Life, or from the Manner of his Death: *Suppose ye, that they were Sinners above others? I tell you, Nay.* And,

II. That the right Use that we ought to make of any Evil or Calamity befalling another Man, either in his Life, or in his Death, is, by the Consideration thereof to be incited to reform and amend whatever is amiss in our own Lives, lest the same Evil that has befallen him, or a worse, should befall us: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

I. I shall shew, that it is a very unwarrantable and uncertain Judgment which we make of any Man from the Evils that befall him in his Life, or from the Manner of his Death: *Think ye that those eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them, were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem. I tell you, Nay.*

And in discoursing on this Point I shall shew,

1. That there is no Warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment.
2. That there is no good Ground from Reason for passing such a Judgment.

3. That such Judgment is liable to great Mistakes and Uncertainties.

4. That in some Instances, we are assured it would have been false.

1. That there is no Warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment.

For it is no where in Scripture plainly said, that every good Man shall certainly be prosperous in this World, and that every wicked Man shall certainly suffer some sad Calamity, or be taken off by a violent and untimely Death. It is no where said in Scripture, that a good Man shall never die by a sad Accident, and that a wicked Man shall never pass a long Life in Health and Prosperity, and at last descend to his Grave in Peace.

Nay, so far is the holy Scripture from giving us any Encouragement to pass our Judgment upon Men from the good or evil Things that befall them in this Life, that on the contrary it expressly declares that a certain Judgment cannot be pass'd concerning any Man this Way. *There is a Vanity that is done upon Earth*, says Solomon, *that there be just Men unto whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked*; again, *there be wicked Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Righteous*, Eccl. viii. 14. And *I considered in my Heart even to declare all this*, says the same wise Observer, Eccl. ix. 1, 2. *that the Righteous, and the Wise, and their Works, are in the Hand of God*; *no Man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all that is before them*. *All Things come alike to all*; *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*; *to the Good, and to the Clean, and to the Unclean*; *to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not*; *as is the Good, so is the Sinner, and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an Oath*.

Thus you see plainly, there is no Warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment upon Men from what befalls them here; and therefore such Judgment, being not so warranted, must needs be rash, uncharitable and uncertain. Especially, considering, as I propounded to shew, in the second Place,

2. That there is as little Ground from Reason, for passing such a Judgment, as from Scripture.

For if there be any reasonable Ground for such Judgment, it must, I think, be drawn from the Nature of God, considered as a Being of infinite Purity and Justice, and the wise Governor of the World. But all that can with Certainty be argued from hence, touching this Matter, is only this:

First; God being of infinite Purity and Holiness, we may be sure that he hates Sin, and that he has a Love for all good Men; but nevertheless, from what befalls a Man in this World, we cannot judge certainly whether he be a good Man or no; because the very same Affliction or Mis-hap, which by the Dispensation of Providence is sent upon one Man in Vengeance, may be sent upon another Man in Mercy; what is designed for Punishment to one Man, may be designed for a fatherly Correction only to another.

Again; God being perfect in Justice, we may be sure that he never punishes or afflicts any Man undeservedly; but it does not therefore follow, that he that is now punished is a greater Sinner than he that is now spared. For he that is now judged may be only *chastened of the Lord, that he should not be condemned with the World*; he may receive all his evil Things here, and have all his good Things reserved for another State: And he that is now spared, may be kept only to be made a severer Example of God's Vengeance another Time, either in this World or the next. According to what is said concerning *Pharaoh*, Exod. ix. 16. *In very Deed, for this Cause have I raised thee up*, or, as it is in the Hebrew, *made thee stand*; that is, for this Cause have I hitherto preserved thee in Life, and made thee to survive the Plagues that have taken away many of thy more innocent Subjects; *for to shew in thee my Power, and that my Name may be declared throughout all the Earth*. Thus, as St. Peter says, *the Lord knoweth how to reserve the Unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished*. 2 Pet. ii. 9.

And lastly, God being the wise Governor of the World, and also perfect in Holiness and Justice, we may be sure that *he will judge the World in Righteousness, and minister Judgment to the People in Uprightness*, as the Psalmist says; we may be sure that he will *render to every Man according to his Works*; we may consequently be sure that he will make a wide Difference between the good and the bad; and may argue as *Abraham* did, Gen. xviii. 25. *That the Righteous should be as the Wicked that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the Earth do Right?* But it does not therefore follow, that this

this great Difference that will certainly be made between the Righteous and the Wicked must needs be made in this World; it is enough that it will certainly be made some Time or other; now, or at another Time. Nay, this Life being properly only a State of Trial, and the next of Retribution, it is most congruous that this Difference should not be constantly made in this World.

3. As the Judgment that we pass upon Men from what befalls them in this World is altogether ungrounded and unwarranted, so it is likewise liable to great Mistakes and Uncertainties; because we may be mistaken in the Nature of those Things which we account good or evil; or, if we are not mistaken in that, if they are indeed as good or as evil as we think them, we may yet be mistaken, when we judge them Arguments of God's Love or Hatred, of his Favour or Displeasure.

And here opens a large Field of Discourse, not to be bounded by the utmost Limits that your Patience would allow to a Sermon: And therefore, that I may not trespass upon it too much, I will have Respect, in what I shall say upon this Head, chiefly to the Case of such as those spoken of in the Text, and in the foregoing Words.

(1.) Then, I say, We may be mistaken in the Nature of those Things which we account good or evil.

Particularly, we usually account it a great Blessing for a Man to live to the full Term of human Life, which, as the *Psalmist* says, is *threescore and ten, or fourscore Years*, and then to die peaceably in his Bed; and a great Misfortune for a Man to be cut off in the Midst of his Days, to be taken away in the Flower of his Age; especially if it be by a violent Death. But I say, that if we consider the Thing well, we shall perceive that the Difference between that which we account a Blessedness, and this which we account a Misfortune, is rather imaginary than real; that it is not in the Things, but in the Persons; because that to a good Man, any Death, at any Time, is a Happiness, *Blessed are the Dead which die in the Lord*; and to a wicked Man, who lives and dies in his Wickedness, the longest Life is no Blessing, and the easiest Death no Comfort.

To a good Man, I say, an early or a late Death are either of them, in some Respects, an Advantage; for if he dies young, he is the sooner freed from the Miseries of this evil World, and translated to a secure and everlasting Happiness, where he is placed out of the Reach of Sin and Temptation, and out of Danger of falling away from God. And is not this an Advantage? to be taken from his Work at Noon, and then to receive his Wages, when others are forced to endure the Burthen, and Heat, and Toil of the whole Day; nay, perhaps to continue till late Night, *working out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. But then, on the other Side, if it pleases God to grant him a long Life, this also will turn to his Advantage; for tho' he be not so happy now at present, as his Co-æval is who died younger, yet he has this to comfort him, and bear him up under the Toil and Labour which he is still to undergo; that the longer he continues in this State of Warfare, and the more Enemies he encounters and overcomes, his Victory will be so much the greater, and his Crown the more glorious; that tho' he stays longer for his Pay, he shall receive it at last with large Interest; that his patient Continuance in Well-doing so long will be recompenced with a more ample Reward; and that his *light Afflictions which are but for a Moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*. So that upon the whole Matter, every good Man may say with St. Paul, Phil. i. 21. *To me to live is Christ, and to die is Gain*.

But now, on the other Side, to a wicked Man to die soon is a Curse, and yet to live long is no Blessing. For if he be cut off young, he dies like a

Fool,

Fool, and is hurried away into endless Misery, without having enjoyed so much as his Portion of good Things in this Life. And if his Days be prolonged, still he is an unhappy Man; for the longer he lives, the more Time he has to account for; and every Day's Misbehaviour will add to his Punishment; and the longest Life is but as a Moment, in Comparison with that Eternity which he will then be condemned to spend in fruitless Repentance and unprofitable Sorrow.

Well, but however, you will say, it is better to die in an House, than in the Street or Fields; to be carried to the Grave by one's Friends, than to be eaten up by Fishes or wild Beasts. It is a sad Thing, you will say, to be burned in one's Bed, or be crushed to Pieces by the Fall of an House; to be cast away at Sea in a Storm, or to be dried up and withered in an Instant, by a Flame of Lightning; and the like.

I answer: If Death it self be terrible, as it certainly is, to the Man that lives in Sin, it is and must be terrible, whatever Shape it comes in: But if it be not terrible in it self, as to a good Man, who is at Peace with God, and in his own Mind, it is not; I do not see, why the Garb and Dress of it should so much fright us; or why we should judge any one Sort of Death much better or worse than another.

There are, I think, but two Things that can reasonably be thought to make very considerable Difference between one Sort of Death and another, *viz.* either because one is more *painful*, or else because it is more *sudden* than another. We will therefore consider these two Things distinctly.

1. Whether a violent Death be more *painful* than what we call a natural Death: For if it be so, I grant it is in that Respect worse.

But of this, I think, we can be no competent Judges, because it is a Matter of only inward Sense; for we never tried either of them our selves, neither have we spoken with any that have tried either of them, and much less both of them. The only Way therefore that is left for us to judge by, is the Observation that we make concerning others; and if Groans, and Sighs, and Complaints, frequent Swoonings, convulsive Motions, and Fits of Madness, be any Indications of extreme Pain, and I think they are the best we know of, there will be nothing then wanting to persuade us, that they who before they die, lie burning many Days in a high Fever, or are tormented with a long Fit of the Gout, or Stone, or Cholick, in Extremity, do endure as much, if not greater Torture, than they that are broken upon the Wheel, or burnt in the Fire, or suffer any other Sort of violent Death.

The Truth is, human Nature is capable of so much Pain, and no more; and I believe there are many Diseases that cause us as much Pain as our Nature in this State will bear; and if any Pain exceeds these Limits, if it once grows intolerable, human Nature sinks under it. Extremity of Pain will soon put an End to it self, and release the Soul from that troublesome *Vehicle*, which causes it intolerable Uneasiness. So that in the State that we are now in, a moderate Pain may be lingering and lasting; but if it be violent, it cannot long continue. But,

2. This perhaps may be accounted the great Unhappiness of a violent Death, that it is for the most part *sudden* and unexpected; that the Soul and Body, those two old Friends, are parted, without taking a solemn Leave of each other; and the Man is hurried away to Judgment, without any Warning.

And this, I confess, is a dreadful Consideration to a wicked Man: It is a sad Thing for such an one, by the Fall of a Tile, or the Kick of an Horse, to be sent away into the Regions of Darkness, when perhaps he had never before once seriously thought of Death, when he had not made the least Preparation for it.

But there are natural Ways of dying as sudden as by any sad Accident whatsoever; and it is as sad a Thing for such an one to go away in his Sleep, or to die of an Apoplexy, or to be seized with an incurable Lunacy. Nay, indeed, it is a sad Thing for such an one to die at all; because no Death, it is to be feared, can be good, after a wicked Life. For it is not the saying, *Lord, have Mercy*, that will cure our evil Habits; that will kill our vicious Affections; that will render us, all in an Instant, good, pure, and holy, and such as God would have us to be. And to keep the Commandments, which Matth. xix. 17. our *Saviour* says is what, *if we would enter into Life*, we must do, is manifestly another Thing than it is only to own, tho' with the greatest and truest Professions of Sorrow, that we have not kept them.

But then the Suddenness of Death, is an evil only to such as are not prepared for it by an holy Life. For to a good Man no Death is bad, no Death indeed is sudden; because a good Man is always prepared to die, and is ever in Expectation of Death: And nothing can be said to be sudden, but what was unexpected, and unlooked for. A good Man therefore, knowing his Time to be uncertain, never puts off the doing of any necessary Work of his Salvation till to Morrow, that can be done to Day: And he that every Day does the Work of the Day, is always ready to give an Account to God of his Work; *And blessed is that Servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing.* To him therefore it can be no Surprise, if as he walks about his lawful Business, he drops down in an Apoplexy; or if when he first awakens out of his natural Sleep, he finds himself in another World: And it is all one to him, if he receives his Death by the Shot of a Bullet, by a Flash of Lightning, or by the Fall of a Tower or an House. The Manner of dying can make no great Difference, when either Way it is over in the Twinkling of an Eye; and when as soon as ever the Man's Soul is released from the Prison of the Body, this House of Clay, it finds the blessed Angels ready to receive it, and conduct it to Heaven; and the Son, its Redeemer, and all the holy Company of the *Spirits of just Men made perfect*, ready to congratulate its safe Arrival to the Mansions of everlasting Joy and Blessedness. Or, if this be a Surprise, it is such an one as we should rather desire and rejoice at, than be afraid of; such an one as it was to St. *Peter*, when having, as I may Acts xii. 6, &c. say, left himself in the Prison *asleep between two Soldiers, and bound with two Chains*, he found himself, at his awaking, under the Conduct of an Angel, walking in the Streets of *Jerusalem*. A sudden Surprise indeed it was, but it was a blessed one; it was such as might well make him at first in some Doubt, whether what had happened to him was true, or he had only seen a Vision; but it was also such an one, as when he came to himself, and was sure of the Truth of it, could not but yield him great Pleasure and Satisfaction.

Thus you see, we may be mistaken in the Nature of those Things which we account *good* and *evil*; and particularly, that a long Life, and a natural Death, are not so certainly good; nor a short Life, and a violent Death, so certainly evil as they are commonly supposed to be. The great Difference between the one and the other, depends upon the Goodness or Wickedness of the several Men to whom they befall: To a good Man, all Things are good; and to a wicked Man, all Things are evil. And the very same Event which to one of them would be the best, may to the other of them be the worst Thing that could happen. So that we cannot with Certainty pronounce any Man blessed, or miserable, from the Accidents that befall him. But,

(2.) Granting the common Opinion which we have of these Things to be true, that they are indeed as good or as evil as we commonly think them to be; yet we may be mistaken, when we judge them Arguments of God's Love
or

or Hatred, of his Favour or Displeasure. *No Man knoweth Love or Hatred, by all that is before them*, says Solomon; that is, no Man can certainly know how God stands affected towards any Person, by the Things, whether good or evil, that befall him in this World. And the Reason of this I have already intimated, *viz.* because this Life is properly a State of Trial only, not of Retribution; and while God is making Trial of Men, it may be very consistent with his Justice, and Hatred to Sin, to spare when they deserve Punishment, and to seek by his Goodness to draw them to Repentance; and it may be likewise very consistent with his Holiness, and with the Love that he bears to good Men, to afflict them with temporal Evils, for the Trial of their Faith, for the Exercise of their Patience, for the Correction and Cure of somewhat that is amiss, or for some other End that he designs to bring about this Way. Nay, it may be very consistent with his Goodness to take them off by a violent, as well as by what is called a natural Death; because how much soever that can be supposed to be worse than this, God is able to make them infinite Amends in another State; and he will certainly *make all Things work together for Good to them that love him.* Eccl. ix. 1. Rom. viii. 28.

I proceed now, in the fourth and last Place,

4. To shew, that as the Judgment which we are apt to pass upon Men, from what befalls them in this Life, or from the Manner of their Death, is always rash, uncharitable and uncertain, so in some Instances that have been, we are assured, such a Judgment would have been false.

For thus, he that from the Afflictions, the more than common Afflictions, that befell *Job*, in which also there were several Marks and Characters of a special Hand and Providence of God, should have concluded, as his Friends did, that however he had been blameless in the Sight of Men, he was nevertheless certainly known to God to be a Man of superlative Wickedness, would have passed upon him a Judgment directly contrary to the Judgment of God himself, who testified of him, *Job i. 8.* that *there was not a Man like him upon the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man, one that feared God, and eschewed Evil.*

And how false their Judgment was, who thought the *Galileans* that were slain by *Pilate*, greater Sinners than the other *Galileans* that escaped; and those eighteen upon whom the Tower in *Siloam* fell and slew them, Sinners above all Men that dwelt in *Jerusalem*; our *Saviour* himself, who perfectly knew *what was in Man*, here plainly tells us, *Think ye that they were Sinners above all others, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, Nay.* Joh. ii. 25.

But these however, it may be you will say, were Sinners; and great Sinners too, although not greater than some others that were not in like manner taken off. Thus much seems to be allowed by our *Saviour* himself in this Way of Expression; *Think ye that they were greater Sinners?*

And what if this be granted? nay, and what if it be farther granted, that the evil Accidents that befell them were in Judgment, and Punishment upon them for their Sins? it does not therefore follow, that because they fared worse than other Men in this World, they shall also fare worse than others in the next. Nay indeed the contrary to this may with better Reason be presumed, *viz.* that having received this Punishment of their Sin in this World, by a temporal Judgment, the Justice of God was, in and through the Merits and Satisfaction of *Christ*, thereby so fully appeased, as that the same Sin shall not be imputed to them to their eternal Condemnation; according to that of the Apostle, *1 Cor. xi. 32.* *When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the World.* For it may be considered, that the Judgment which the Apostle there speaks of, was not only of the Calamities of Life, but likewise of that temporal Death which was inflicted upon some that had been guilty of great Irregularities in the Celebration

lebration of the holy Communion, as may be seen, *ver. 30. For this Cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* Even those that *slept*, that is, who were smitten with Death, as well as those that were smitten with Diseases, were, as the *Apostle* seems plainly to intimate, *chastned of the Lord* here, *that they might not be condemned with the World* hereafter.

Thus though it be supposed that a violent Death were always sent for the personal Transgression of the Man that suffered it, we could not therefore conclude, that because he was taken away in Judgment, he was so taken away in God's Displeasure, as to be excluded from his Mercy in the other World.

But I said before, and that I still abide by; That in judging a Man to be
 Eccl. vii. 20. a Sinner; in any other Sense, I mean, than as we are all Sinners, *there not being a just Man upon Earth that doeth Good and sinneth not*; or in judging a Man to be a greater Sinner than others, only because he comes to his Death by a sad Accident, such as that spoken of in the Text, or because he is taken off by any other Sort of violent Death; we pass such a Judgment as in some Instances of these Kinds would have been plainly false.

For what shall we think of the *Prophet of Judah*, who was sent by God to prophesy against the Altar at *Bethel*, and in his Return home was slain by a Lion? whose Story you have in the thirteenth Chapter of the first Book of

Ver. 9. *Kings*. It is true indeed, he had transgressed the Order that was given him by God, not to eat Bread or drink Water there. But then it is to be considered, that his Transgression of this Precept, which was at most but a ceremonial Precept, was not out of any Aversion he had to it, or out of a rebellious Spirit; for he shewed all the Willingness that could be to comply with it; and when the King himself had invited him to a royal Entertainment

Ver. 8. at his Palace, he had refused to accept of his Kindness upon any Terms, even although the King would have *given him half his House*, only to have dined with him; and the Reason of his Refusal, he says himself, was because he had been otherwise ordered by God. And in the same obedient Mind he continued after that, for having delivered his Message, he immediately set forwards on his Journey, and was on his Way returning home; when he was over-

Ver. 14. taken by a reverend old Man, who told him that he also was a Prophet as he was, and that he had lately received a Revelation from God, by which that former Order given him not to eat or drink there, had been revoked, and by which he himself had been commanded to invite him to his House, and to entertain him there with Bread and Drink. His Transgression therefore, of the Order that God had given him, though not to be justified, yet seems not to have proceeded from any Wickedness in his Mind; he was indeed over-credulous in believing another Man's Pretence to Revelation, against a clear Revelation that had been given to himself; but it appears to have been an Error of his Judgment only, not a Fault in his Will; for it seems highly probable from the whole Story, that he would not upon any Account, by no Inducements or Persuasions whatever, have been prevailed with to go back, had he not been really persuaded that the other Prophet had indeed received such a Revelation as he pretended, vacating and countermanding, in that Particular, the Revelation which had been before made to himself.

But now the Crime of the *old Prophet of Bethel* who lyed to this Prophet, and who knew that he lyed when he told him he had received such a Revelation, was manifestly exceeding great: For what Crime almost can be conceived greater, than it was to utter a known Untruth in the Name of God? Had therefore the Death of the *Prophet of Judah* by the Lion been designed chiefly as a Punishment for Sin, the wilful Deceiver, one would think, should rather have been so punished, than he that was, I had almost said, *innocently*, deceived; his Crime being of the two, evidently, much the greatest. But it hapned quite otherwise; the true Prophet was slain by a Lion, and

and the Deceiver and false Prophet escaped, and for ought appears to the contrary, died in Peace in his Bed. It is therefore highly probable that the Death of this Prophet who was slain by the Lion, though it might be truly called a Judgment of God upon him for his Disobedience, yet was not designed by God so much for his Punishment, as to give Confirmation to the Truth of that Prophecy which he had before uttered against the Altar in Bethel. And this it did, even to the full Satisfaction of that false Prophet who had deceived him; who therefore ordred himself to be buried in the same Grave with him, that so when the Time should come wherein that Prophecy was to be fulfilled, as he was then well assured it should be, his Bones might not be disturbed.

Another Instance of this Kind, wherein such Judgment concerning a Man from the Manner of his Death would have been plainly false, we have in *Josiah*, who was slain by the Sword of his Enemies, and in the Vigor of his Age, under forty Years old. And now who that had read only the History of his Death, would not have concluded that he was certainly one of the worst of the Kings of *Judah*, at least, much worse than his Grandfather *Manasseh*, who lived sixty seven, and reigned five and fifty Years, and at last died in Peace. And yet if you read the whole History of both their Lives, you will find that as *Manasseh* had been the very worst, so *Josiah* was the best King that had reigned in *Judah*: For of him the Scripture it self testifies, that he did that which was right in the Sight of the Lord, and walked in all the Way of David his Father, and turned not aside to the right Hand or to the left. And in another Place, that like unto him there was no King before him, that turned to the Lord with all his Heart, and with all his Soul, and with all his Might, according to all the Law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him.

But there is no Sort of violent Death, that can with better Reason be thought a Judgment of God upon the Person that suffers it, than that which is inflicted by the Sentence of the Magistrate, who is God's Deputy and Vicegerent upon Earth, who acts in God's Place, and of whose Judgment it is expressly said in Scripture, that it is God's Judgment. *It is judgment for Man, but for the Lord, said Jehosaphat to the Judges whom he had appointed in the Cities of Judah.* And, *He, says the Apostle, speaking of the Civil Magistrate, is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doeth Evil.* If therefore we might say of any Man that dies a violent Death, that he is smitten of God for his evil Deeds, we might, I think, with the most Certainty say it of those who are formally tried and condemned to Death as Malefactors, by the Sentence of these Ministers of God, these Executioners of his Wrath; and who are put to Death by that Sword which God himself has given into their Hands. But what shall we say then of those ancient Worthies, who by this very Judgment were tortured, and had Trial of cruel Mockings and Scourgings? and not only so, but who were stoned, and sawn asunder, and slain with the Sword? For so the Author to the Hebrews tells us a great many were, of whom the World was not worthy. Or what then shall we say of all the holy Apostles of our Lord, and of the noble Army of Martyrs both of the present and former Ages, who by the Sentence of God's Deputy, the Civil Magistrate, have been condemned to various Kinds of Death, by many Degrees more sad and painful than either the *Galileans* suffered who were slain by *Pilate*, or those eighteen upon whom the Tower in *Siloam* fell?

When therefore we see any Man stricken, as it were, by the Hand of God, and taken away by a violent Death, either by the Judgment of the Magistrate, or by a sad Accident, though we may and ought to rest satisfied in it, so far as the Providence of God is therein concerned, firmly believing that God is

Pfal. cxlv. 17. *righteous in all his Ways, and holy in all his Works*: We ought not however to say, nay we ought not so much as to think within our selves, Surely this Man was a great Sinner; greater than we who are left alive; greater than others that die peaceably in their Beds, and in a good old Age. For whatever another Man has suffered is no more than we all, even the best of us, do deserve to suffer; and it is not any Worthiness in any of us, but only the great Mercy and Long-suffering of God, that has kept us so long in Life and Safety. And if upon this we take Occasion to judge uncharitably of our Brother, or to pride and please our selves in a fond Conceit that we are the special Favourites of Heaven, that God sees no Sin in us, and that we need no Amendment; we shall at length find to our Cost, that God's present Forbearance of us is only a Reservation of us for some greater Punishment, either in this World or in the other.

And this leads me to the second Point I propounded to discourse of, *viz.*

II. To shew, that the right Use which we ought to make of any Evil or Calamity befalling another Man, either in his Life, or in his Death, is by the Consideration thereof to be incited to reform and amend whatever is amiss in our own Lives, lest the same Evil that has befallen him, or a worse, should befall us: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

For it is certain, that all the temporal Judgments of God are sent upon Men for the Punishment of Sin; though not always of *their* Sin in particular, or of *their's* more especially who are stricken by it. For the temporal Judgments of God are most commonly designed for national Punishments: And when a whole Nation deserves to be rooted out for their scandalous Wickedness, it is indeed great Mercy and Goodness in God, that he is pleased to make some few of them only Examples for a Terror to the rest. Herein God deals with a sinful Nation, as it is customary for earthly Governors or Commanders of Armies to do in the Case of Sedition or Mutiny; it is not fit that the Crime should be wholly unpunished, because then the Authority of the Governor would quickly become vile and slighted; and yet should all that partake in the Crime be involved in the Punishment, the Execution would be too bloody and severe. In such a Case therefore they commonly mix Mercy with Severity, and take out by Lot, as they judge needful, one out of ten, or one out of twenty, or one out of an hundred; and having done Execution upon them, let the rest go free, in Hope that by the Punishment which some have suffered, and which they all had been in Danger of, they will be deterred from committing the like Crime again.

cxix. 106. And thus, I say, God often deals with a sinful Nation, when it is *Time for him to work*, because *they have made void his Law*; he nevertheless, even in Judgment, commonly remembers Mercy, and smites only some, and lets others escape, cuts off some, and gives others a longer Time of Trial.

And not only so, but in setting some out for Execution, he seems also to take them just as if it were by Lot, by mere Chance and Accident. In these national Judgments he commonly lets the Arrows of his Vengeance flie, as it were at random, just as if he were not at all concerned who were stricken, or who escaped. Such, I say, the Administration of his Providence in executing his Vengeance in this World commonly seems to us; and it must needs seem so, when, according to the best Judgment that we can make concerning Men, we see the Good and the Bad, the Righteous and the Wicked, and as many in proportion of the one Sort as of the other, afflicted by the same Judgment, destroyed by the same Plague, or cut off by the same evil Accident.

And yet this Method of the divine Providence, is in Truth the wisest that could be taken; the most suitable to the Nature and Design of *temporal*, and especially

especially of *national* Judgments; and wherein there is an admirable Mixture of Wisdom, of Justice, and of Goodness.

For should none but good Men suffer in a national Calamity, this would make it look as if the World were governed by a wicked Spirit; and besides would give too great Encouragement to Men to live in Wickedness, by making it appear to them the most probable Means of saving and securing themselves from Harm. It is therefore plainly necessary, that in a national Judgment, some at least should be chosen out from among the wicked to be made Examples.

And yet, on the other Side, should none but notorious wicked Men suffer in such a Calamity, this would give too much Ground to think that this Life was designed by God for a State of Retribution as well as of Trial to Men; and consequently that there might possibly be no other Life after this. And besides, such an Execution as this would not so well answer the End of a national Judgment: For what Judgment or Punishment would it be to a Nation to have none cut off from it, but only such as it self would wish to be cut of? such as it would be glad to be rid of? such as being Disturbers of the publick Peace and Welfare would have been taken away by human Justice, if that could have its due Course against all Crimes and upon all Offenders? But it is truly a Judgment and a Calamity to a Nation to be deprived of some of its best Members, to have those cut off that are the most useful to it, and do the most Good in it. So that a Nation is then most severely punished when the Judgment lights chiefly upon such; the Loss of a few good Persons out of it being a much greater Loss and Damage to it, than it would have been to have had ten Times the same Number of other Men taken away.

When therefore the Providence of God takes this Course, and destroys both the good and the bad by the same common Calamity, this both is an Argument of God's highest Displeasure, and also gives just Ground to fear, that he designs not to stop at this, but to go on and punish the sinful Nation still seven Times more for their Iniquity.

I say, first, it is an Argument of God's highest Displeasure at present. And in this Sense I understand those Words of the Prophet *Ezekiel*, Chap. xxi. Ver. 3, 4, 5. *Say to the Land of Israel, Thus saith the Lord; behold I am against thee, and will draw forth my Sword out of his Sheath, and will cut off from thee the Righteous and the Wicked. Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the Righteous and the Wicked, therefore shall my Sword go forth out of his Sheath against all Flesh, from the South to the North; that all Flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn forth my Sword out of his Sheath; it shall not return any more. It shall not return any more;* that is, it shall go on destroying till it has made a full End.

And this was what I farther said; viz. that when God proceeds after this Manner, destroying in any publick Calamity the Righteous with the Wicked, this affords great Cause to fear that his Justice will not be satisfied with this one Execution, but that he intends to punish the sinful Nation still seven Times more for their Iniquity. For so, when he gave good King *Josiah*, the best King that ever reigned in *Judah*, to be slain by the Sword of his Enemies, the Reason was, because he was resolved to destroy this Nation, to remove *Judah* also out of his Sight, as he had removed *Israel*; and therefore he took him first away, that his Eyes might not see the evil that he was bringing upon his People. And whenever he suffers good Men, especially if they were remarkably such, to be taken away by the destroying Angel in a common Plague or Calamity, whoever wisely and religiously considers the Matter, will always be apt to fear it is for the same Reason; according to that of the Prophet, *Isaiah* lvii. 1. *The Righteous perisheth, and*

2 Kings xxiii.

27.

—xxii. 20.

no Man layeth it to Heart; and merciful Men are taken away, none considering, that the Righteous is taken away from the Evil to come.

And as it is an Argument of God's severest Displeasure against a whole Nation, when he thus takes away, as it were without Discrimination, the Righteous and the Wicked; so this same is likewise an Instance and Expression of his wonderful Grace and Goodness to particular Men: Indeed, he shews herein as much Goodness and Tenderness to particular Persons, as he could possibly do, while he is executing his just Vengeance upon that whole sinful Nation which they compose. For what can be more gracious, what can be more agreeable to the infinite Goodness of that God, *who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance*, than it is to take away in a common and national Calamity, such as will be the least Sufferers by it in their own Persons, such as are fittest to die? and to endure with much Long-suffering the Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction; that is, such Persons as if he should then take them away must be unavoidably miserable to all Eternity; but who may, and it is to be hoped, will, by this Goodness and Forbearance of God be led to Repentance?

2 Pet. iii. 9.

Rom. ix. 22.

Rom. ii. 4, 5, 6.

But if neither by the Judgment that has befallen others, nor by the Goodness that has been shewed to themselves, they be brought to Repentance, their Case then will be worse than if they had been taken off sooner. For unless they repent, the longer they continue in the World, they will have only the more Sins to answer for; and by despising the Riches of God's Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, they will only treasure up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according to his Deeds. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

I crave your Patience only while I make Application of what has been said to our selves, with Regard to a Case that has lately happened among us, and which is a principal Occasion of our present Meeting.

And I might almost say of the Words of the Text, as our Saviour in Luke iv. 21. did concerning a Text which he was then preaching upon, out of the Prophet Isaiah; *This Day is this Scripture fulfilled in your Ears.* For we have had lately among our selves an Instance like to that spoken of in the Text, only much more severe and terrible. For many more we have heard of than eighteen that have been killed upon the Land, much in such Manner as these Men were, by the Fall of Walls and Houses upon their Heads; and I fear I might say, there have been more than as many hundred cast away and drowned at Sea in the late dreadful Storm; none of which had more Reason to fear, or expect their Death at that Time, than we had, who by the Goodness of God are still alive.

Now why they were taken away, and why we were left, we our selves can give no Reason. Only this we may be sure of, that it was not because we were better than they, that they are dead and we alive: This we may be sure of, that there were not worse Men taken away, than are still remaining among us; nay, and it is farther highly probable that there are not better Men now alive, than some were, who by that violent Tempest were forcibly driven into that Haven where they would be, into the Haven of eternal Rest and Peace. It is impossible therefore for us to give a Reason of this Dispensation of Providence as to particular Men; and of what we are not able to make a true Judgment, the Judgment that we give, if it be not uncharitable, must at least be rash and uncertain. Let us therefore, as the Apostle exhorts, 1 Cor. iv. 5. *judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to Light the hidden Things of Darkeness, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Hearts: And then shall every Man have Praise of God.* Think ye, says our Lord, that they were Sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay.

But

But whether they were Sinners or no, or whether they were Sinners above others or no, that have been taken away in this sad Calamity, the Calamity it self was doubtless a Judgment of God upon us all, even upon the whole Nation, for our manifold and crying Sins: And *when the Judgments of God* Iſai. 26. 9. *are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World should learn Righteousness.* They that have been taken away by this Judgment, seemingly in God's Displeasure, are Examples to us of that Vengeance which we had all of us deserved, and which we had also all of us felt, if he had suffered his whole Displeasure to arise.

Let not *us* therefore who have escaped, let not even such of us as have escaped by a signal, or even wonderful Providence of God, as some have done, think ever the better of our selves for this; for we are not by this absolved; our Judgment is but only delayed for a while. And it may be remembered, *how that the Lord having saved the People out of the Land of* Jude 5. *Egypt, and that too by Signs and Wonders, by a mighty Hand and a stretched out Arm, yet afterward destroyed them that believed not.*

But even this cannot yet be said of us, that *we are saved*; all that can be said, is, that we are not yet destroyed; but how soon we may be, God only knows; and that too by a much worse Destruction than they were who perished in the late dreadful Tempest. For the same Hand that then smote us, is still held over us; and though we hope that the Winds and Storms have already fulfilled all that was given them in Command by God, yet the same Word at which they arose can arm and send forth any other of his Creatures for our Destruction. The same Power that has shaken the Tops of our Houses, can shake the Foundations also, and make them become in an Instant an Heap of Rubbish to cover and bury our dead Carcasses in; and he that has given so many of late to be swallowed up by the Sea, can, if he pleases, command the Earth also to swallow up us that remain. Some Menaces of this Kind, it is said, we have lately had in some Parts of the Nation. But this we may be assured of, that unless we improve to good Purpose the Respite which God now affords us, we shall yet fall under a heavier Condemnation than if we had been called to Judgment sooner: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

And that we have not yet repented to good Purpose is evident, because for all the Evils that God has hitherto sent upon us, *his Anger is not turned away, but his Hand is stretched out still.* For there are four Things which God calls his *four sore Judgments, the Sword, and the Famine, and the noi-* Ezek. 14. 21. *som Beast, and the Pestilence*; the first of which, and, if David thought right, the forest of all God's Judgments, *the Sword*, has been now, almost 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. without Intermission, for several Years past, and is still very heavy upon us; though, God be thanked, not so heavy as in other Countries where the Seat of the War has been; nor yet so heavy as it might have been, and, as we have Reason to fear, it still may be. For if in the War we are now engaged in, we should be unsuccessful, it may, and probably will be, in its Consequences, a great deal sorer Evil than any that has yet befallen us; and much better would it have been for us to have perished before, though by the worst of Accidents, than to live to see, which yet we must then expect to see, our Country devoured by Strangers, our holy Religion abolished, and Popery and Slavery entailed upon us and our Posterity for ever.

Great Reason there is therefore that we should pray continually, as we do, for good Success in this War, on the Issue whereof the Fate of the whole Nation, both as to Temporals and Spirituals, does, to all Appearance, depend; and upon whatever other special Occasion we are at any Time called upon to fast, and to humble our selves before God, in a Sense of his heavy Displeasure, it ought to be a considerable Part of our Prayer, that God

would be now with us, to help us, and to fight our Battles; and that, howsoever he may think fit to correct us for our Sins, he would yet never deliver us up into the Hands of those Men whose Mercies are cruel. This is what, among other Things, we have been now begging of God; and I hope the Consideration of his great Displeasure against us, manifestly shewed forth in the late terrible Storm, has made us do it with more than usual Seriousness and Devotion.

But fasting and praying alone will not obtain our Pardon; they alone will not avert from us the Judgments of God, or procure the Continuance of his Mercies. The heathen Ninevites understood better than this by the Light of Nature only; and therefore when their Destruction had been threatned by *Jonah* the Prophet, they, by the same Proclamation which ordered general Fasting and Supplication, enjoined likewise a general Reformation of Manners; *Jonah* iii. 6, 7, 8. when the Word came to the King of Nineveh, he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh, by the Decree of the King and his Nobles, saying, Let Man and Beast be covered with Sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil Way, and from the Violence that is in their Hands. This is the Magistrate's Part, to forbid, and, so far as in them lies, by wholesome Laws, and a vigorous Execution of them, effectually to restrain and suppress, at least the open Practice of Wickedness. And in this, there has, I think, been nothing wanting on the Part of our most religious and gracious Queen. May all her Ministers of State, and Officers of Justice but do their Duties as well; may You, the Magistrates of this Capital City, be herein a good Pattern to the whole Kingdom; and may there be on the People's Part, and I pray God there may be in all of us as ready and full a Compliance with Her Majesty's pious Designs, as there was in the Subjects of *Nineveh*; and then we may reasonably hope, that our Fasting and Prayer will be as availing as theirs was; that when God

Jonah iii. 10. sees our Works, and that we turn from our evil Way, he also will repent of the Evil that he thought to do unto us. Then, and upon no other Terms, we may reasonably expect that he will bless us with Victory and good Success, and in his own due Time with such a Peace as may tend to the Glory of his great Name, the Preservation of his Church and true Religion, the Honour and Safety of Her Majesty, and the Security and Prosperity of these Kingdoms.

Which God of his Mercy grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.



DISCOURSE C.

The Lawfulness and the right Manner of keeping *Christmas*, and other Christian Festivals.

Preached on CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1704.



ISAIAH V. II, 12.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night, till Wine inflame them.

And the Harp, and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts: But they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.



THE Prophet had in the Beginning of this Chapter shewed under the Parable of a Vineyard, the base Ingratitude of the Jews towards God, and the Judgments which they might deservedly expect; Now, says the Prophet, *will I sing to my well Beloved a Song of my Beloved, touching his Vineyard. My Beloved hath a Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the Stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest Vine, and built a Tower in the midst of it, and also made a Winepress therein, and he looked that it should bring forth Grapes, and it brought forth wild Grapes. And now, O Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard. What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes? And now, go to, I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard: I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the Wall there-*

of, and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up Briars and Thorns. I will also command the Clouds that they rain no Rain upon it. And then follows the Application. For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant; and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.

And then after this general Charge laid against them of Ingratitude, Unfruitfulness, and notorious Wickedness, the Prophet proceeds in the remaining Part of the Chapter to make it good in several Particulars, instancing especially in their Covetousness and Injustice, *ver. 8.* their Intemperance, Prophaness, and Irreligion, *ver. 11.* their affected Blindness and Ignorance in their Duty, *ver. 13.* their Wilfulness, Presumption, and Impudence in sinning, *ver. 18.* their prophane scoffing at, and despising the divine Threatnings, *ver. 19.* their confounding the Notions of Good and Evil, *ver. 20.* their foolish Conceitedness of themselves, *ver. 21.* their valuing themselves upon their Strength to do Wickedness, *ver. 22.* and their notorious Bribery, Injustice, and perverting of Judgment, *ver. 23.* And at the mention of most of these, the Prophet denounces severally a special *Woe* against the Persons allowing themselves in the Sins there particularly mentioned; and at the Conclusion of all, from the twenty fourth Verse to the End, declares the high Displeasure that God had taken against his People, for these their many and great Provocations, and the terrible and severe Judgments, which he had already sent and executed upon them for the same; and was determined, if they still went on to provoke him as they had done, to continue and increase until he should have utterly destroyed them. This is, in short, the Sum and Design of this whole Chapter.

The Words which I have chosen at present to discourse of, in the eleventh and twelfth Verses, contain the second of those particular Charges against the *Jews*, which I beforementioned; and which I called a Charge of *Intemperance, Prophaness, and Irreligion*; and it is also one of those which denounces a special *Woe* against the Persons that were liable to it. *Woe unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night, till Wine inflame them. And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.* And this I called a Charge laid against them, not only of *Intemperance and Sensuality*, tho' that be the Thing that seems to be most directly charged upon them, but likewise of *Prophaness and Irreligion*; for it seems to be here intimated, that the Intemperance and Sensuality which they allowed themselves in, was at such Times as were specially designed and appointed by God for a religious Commemoration of his Benefits; *the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord*; i. e. that Work of God in Memory of which those Feasts were kept. It was therefore a Fault in them, and a great one too, that they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered the Operation of his Hands; and it was another great Fault, that they allowed themselves too freely in Gluttony, Drunkenness, and Sensuality; but that which was a great Aggravation of both these Faults was their Complication, that is, that they spent that very Time in the Practice of these Sins, wherein they were under a special Obligation of exercising themselves in those Duties, *viz.* on the solemn *Feast-Days*, appointed and ordained on purpose, religiously to commemorate the Blessings and Benefits they had received from God, and to return him their hearty Thanks for the same. *The Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Harp, and Wine are in their Feasts*; there was Mirth and Jollity enough, and too much; but at the same Time little or no Religion; there was not more too much

of

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of the former, than there was too little of the latter; for *they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered they the Operation of his Hands.*

This it seems was too often the *Jews* Way of keeping their religious Feasts: In the feasting Part, they took Care not only to do, but to overdo; but in the religious Part they did nothing at all: So far were they from spending the Time of the sacred Festival in devout Praises and Thanksgivings to God, for those Mercies or Deliverances which those Festivals were ordained to commemorate, that they had no Regard to, or Consideration of them at all; their only Care and Thought was to make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof; and in that they were as careful and thoughtful as they could possibly be; *rising up early in the Morning, that they might follow strong Drink, and continuing until Night, till Wine inflamed them.*

And I wish I could say that this was not also too often the *Christians* Way of keeping their holy Feasts; sure I am, it is too too commonly our Way of keeping them; and especially of this great Festival of all, which we at this Time celebrate, in Memory of the greatest Miracle of the divine Mercy that was ever shewn to Mankind, *viz.* God's sending his own Son into the World for their Redemption. On this Festival, and I shall add too, in Commemoration of this Benefit? what more customary than for Men to *rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, and to continue until Night, till Wine inflame them?* Now, if ever, we look to hear the Sound of the *Harp* and the *Viol*, of the *Tabret* and *Pipe*; this is reckoned the proper Season for Musick, and Noise, and Merry-making; now also is Wine in our Feasts; this is the Time, the Time of the whole Year, for good Eating and Drinking: But then our Thoughts are commonly so taken up, and our Time so much employed in these Things, that we have no Mind to, or no Leisure for any Thing that is good; God is not in all our Thoughts, not now, I say, when in Reason he ought to be most there; we *Regard not in our Minds the Work of the Lord, neither do we consider the Operation of his Hands.*

But since the Case is so, will some perhaps be ready to say, that this Festival, however at first perhaps piously designed, is now so very much abused, why is it not rather quite laid aside? Why should we continue the Observation of a Feast, which is so commonly, so customarily, nay, so constantly, every Year an Occasion of much Sin? and Time was, we have been told, *Ano 1644.* and you may perhaps some of you remember, when this Counsel so far prevailed, that this Day was by Order observed as a Fast: Time was, when the Churches on this Day were generally kept shut, and the Shops were ordered to be kept open; and a Sort of *Inquisition* was set up against even those Kinds of Food, which had been most customarily in Use at this Season. But what Warrant the then Reformers had for this, from the *Pattern shewed to them in the Mount*, according to which they pretended to make all their Reformation, I could never yet learn. *An. 1645, &c.*

For the *Jewish* Feasts, (the Feast of the Passover, kept in Memory of their Deliverance out of *Egypt*; that of Pentecost, in Memory of the Overthrow of *Pharaoh* in the *Red Sea*, and of the giving the Law upon Mount *Sinai*; and the Feast of Tabernacles, in Memory of their dwelling so long in the Wilderness in Tents, and of the Wonders which God did there; these Feasts, I say) had, as is plainly intimated in the Text, been abused by some loose and dissolute Persons amongst the *Jews*, just as ours have been; they had been made by some the Seasons, they had proved to some the Occasions of much Excess and sinful Extravagance: But were they for this Reason thought fit to be laid aside and abolished? Were they for this Reason forbidden to be observed any longer?

No, perhaps you will say, for these were of divine Institution, and therefore could not by any Human or Ecclesiastical Authority be laid aside, as ours may be; the Celebration of which has been ordained only by human Prudence, and the Authority of the Church.

And this indeed is true; that those Festivals which were instituted by God, could not be abolished by Men; neither could any Man, how much soever they were abused, have taken upon him to abolish them, without setting up his own Wisdom against God's.

I did not therefore ask why the *Jews* themselves, *i. e.* why the *High-Priest*, or the *Sanhedrim*, or the *King* for the Time being, or whoever else is supposed to have had the supreme Ecclesiastical Authority in the Nation; I did not, I say, ask, why these did not lay aside the Celebration of those Feasts, in which there had been commonly so much Luxury, Drunkenness, and Intemperance, and so little Religion; but I only ask'd in general, why they were not laid aside and abolished? and laid aside, without Doubt, they might have been, and abolished, by the same Authority by which they had been ordained, *i. e.* by God himself: But it did not, you see, seem good to the divine Wisdom to take this Method of preventing the sinful Abuse of such holy Festivals; all that God himself thought fit to do in the Case, was to warn the People against thus prophaning a religious Institution, and to denounce a *Woe* against those that did; *Woe unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, &c.*

For he knew how insensible we generally are of the divine Benefits, how apt we are to let them slip out of our Minds, and how necessary it is that our Memory thereof should be frequently refreshed; he knew how very requisite it was that some special Times and Seasons should be appointed for this Purpose, there being great Danger that *that* good Work will never be done at all, for the doing whereof some special Time is not appointed: He knew also that they that were wise and religious would consider and understand the Loving-Kindness of God, not only in granting the Blessing or Benefit commemorated, but likewise in ordering them to rejoice in his Goodness, and to continue the Memory thereof with solemn Praises and Thanksgivings; and that such as were loose and sensual, and given to Intemperance, would not have been restrained from their Rioting and sinful Extravagances, only by abolishing such Seasons of publick Praise and Rejoycing; but that if they had not had those, they would have taken other Occasions of fulfilling the same fleshly Lusts; so that only to have abolished such Festivities, would not have been a Means of reforming the wicked Part of the World, *that* would still have been as lusting, as sensual, as intemperate, both then, and at other Times, as it too commonly was upon the holy Festival; for the same corrupt Heart would, at all Times, and upon all Occasions, have produced plentifully the same corrupt Fruits; but to those who were piously and well disposed, it would have been indeed a great Detriment and Disadvantage, by the Abolishment of those Days, to have been deprived of those blessed Opportunities which were therein afforded them, of contemplating the divine Goodness, and impressing the Sense thereof strongly upon their Minds, and working themselves up to the highest Degrees of Love and Gratitude to God their most bountiful Benefactor.

In a Word; it is Matter of Fact, that these Festivals, tho' they had been much prophaned and abused by some wicked and licentious Persons, were not, however, by any Command of God laid aside, or forbidden to be any longer observed; and it is, I think, highly probable, that the Reasons above-mentioned, or such like, were the Reasons why they were nevertheless continued: But however that be, since they were by the Wisdom of God thought fit to be still continued and observed, notwithstanding the ill Use

that some prophane and profligate Persons had made of them; I can see no Reason, why the Governors of the Christian Church may not, in a like Case, reasonably follow the Pattern which the Wisdom of God has set them; and still continue the Observation of those Christian Festivals, and of this in particular, which were instituted at first with a pious Design, and from the religious Observation whereof such as are piously and virtuously inclined may, and do, without Doubt, receive much spiritual Advantage; altho' there be now, as there were formerly among the *Jews*, some lewd and prophane Persons, who, by their wicked Abuse of them, spending them in Excess and Drunkenness, and other Lusts of the Flesh, do hasten, ascertain, and much increase their own Damnation.

For tho' it cannot, indeed, be said, it is not pretended by us, that any of these Festivals, or this of *Christmas* in particular, was instituted, as the *Jewish* Festivals before spoken of were, by the special Direction and Command of God; so that it might be abolished by human Authority, which those could not be, without opposing or contradicting a positive divine Institution: Yet this we may say, and this we do affirm, that the Blessing and Benefit which we now commemorate, *viz.* the Redemption of the World, by the Incarnation of the Son of God, who was manifested as at this Time, to destroy the Works of the Devil, was an infinitely greater Benefit, than the Deliverance of the *Israelites* out of *Egypt*, than the Destruction of *Pharaoh* and his Host in the *Red Sea*, or than the miraculous Preservation of the *Jews* for forty Years in the Wilderness; so that if they deserved to be kept in perpetual Remembrance, by annual Festivals, instituted in Commemoration thereof, much more does this deserve to be in like Manner remembred with Joy and Thankfulness. There was good Reason therefore that the Church should appoint some Day or Days in the Year, whereon this should be done; for a publick Work of Religion, as this is, must have a special Time appointed for it, or else it cannot be done at all.

Now this is all that the Church does; she appoints a certain Time whereon all her Members should meet in religious Assemblies, to sing and give Praises to God for this his inestimable Benefit; and that they may be furnished with proper Matter for Devotion and Meditation, she provides Prayers to be used, and appoints Portions of Scripture to be read, and Sermons to be preached, suitable to the Occasion; and that they may have Leisure, and be in better Disposition of Mind for this holy Exercise, she discharges them, for that Time, from the Works and Labours of their ordinary Callings; and, as suitable to such a Time of rejoycing, she commends the Exercise of Charity and Hospitality; and she may, perhaps, be said also to permit, but that is the most that can be said, a freer and more plentiful Use of the good Creatures of God, than the Conditions and Circumstances of Men could furnish them with at all other Times of the Year; but all the while she strictly enjoyns them to keep within the Bounds of Temperance and Sobriety; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever else they do, not unbecoming an holy Festival, to do all to the Glory of God.

Thus, I think, it appears that there was good Reason at first for the appointing this holy Festival to be kept, in such devout and religious Manner as the Church has directed it to be kept. And if there was good Reason for its first Institution, there is, I think, the same Reason why it should continue still to be observed, and that notwithstanding some Abuses that have crept into, and some Inconveniences that have arisen by, the Observation thereof. For what is there so good that has not been misused? Or what is there so useful that has not been attended with some Inconveniences? even in eating and drinking many Sins are every Day committed? Is it fit there-
fore

fore that a Law should be made to forbid Eating and Drinking; or that publick Officers should be appointed to deliver out to every one his Meat and Drink by Weight and Measure? There is great Excess in Apparel, would it be reasonable therefore to forbid the wearing of any Cloaths, or to command that no Cloaths should be made, but such as are absolutely necessary, and those of the coarsest Stuff, and after the plainest Fashion? And as little Reason is there to abolish a religious Festival, which was well designed, and which is of excellent Use to such as are piously and well disposed, and which, according to the Observation of it which the Church directs, is a very probable Means to reclaim even those that are vicious, and by reminding them of the Mercies and Blessings of God, which otherwise they would never have thought of at all, to bring them to some Sense of Duty and Gratitude; as little Reason, I say, is there to abolish such a religious Festival, only because some prophane Persons do, and will, take Occasion to spend it in Rioting and Drunkenness, and Uncleaness. For that they do thus spend it, whose Fault is it? Is it not their own? Does the Church, which appoints it to be observed, direct that it should be observed in this Manner?

No, perhaps you will say, that indeed she does not, she commands it to be kept in a quite different Manner; but however thus, notwithstanding all the Provision she has made to prevent it, it has been kept, and thus, after all the Care she can take about it, it probably will be kept by a great many; and therefore to cut off Occasion from such as will take Occasion, we think it had better not be kept at all, but be made again, as it once was, a Day of ordinary Work and Labour.

And do you think then, indeed, that the Abolishment of this Festival would help very much to reform the World? No such Matter. For do not they that eat to Excess at this Time, eat as much to Excess at any other Time, when they have Plenty before them of such Provision as they like? Are not they that are drunk on the *Christmas* Holidays as free to be drunk at any other Time of the Year, when they can find Time and Money for it? Do not they that now *rise up early in the Morning to follow strong Drink, and continue till Night, till Wine inflame them*, do the same, whenever else in the Year they can get to be released for a Day or two, from the Labours of their Calling? Are not they that now spend whole Days and Nights in excessive Gaming, to the Neglect of their Business, and the Wasting of their Estates, and the Impoverishment of their Families, as ready and desirous to do the same at any other Season of the Year, when they can meet with (and such are never hard to be met with Persons) as idle, and as Spend thrift as themselves? Nay, do not they that spend the *Christmas* Holidays in Idleness and Excess, and sinful Pleasures, most commonly spend all other Days dedicated to Religion after the same Manner? Do not they commonly make the same Use of a Fasting Day, that they do of a Festival? Do not they commonly spend the Lord's Day it self as idly and as sinfully as they do *Christmas-Day*? It is not therefore the Day that corrupts, or helps to spoil the Men, but they are the Men that corrupt and spoil the Day. And therefore, if in order to prevent and reform this Abuse, it be necessary to abolish any one Day that has too customarily been thus abused and prophaned, it will be necessary, for the same Reason, to abolish all other Days that have been in the like Manner prophaned, or that are liable to be in like Manner abused: And then, that Men may have no Time or Leisure for their Vices, it will be necessary that they should be kept, as the *Israelites* were in the *Egyptian* Bondage, to hard and continual Labour; for if ever they are suffered to cease from their Burthens, they will (such of them, I mean, as are wickedly and prophanelly inclined; they will) be employing that

that leisure Time in making Provision for the Flesh, to fulfill the Lusts thereof. Then, that none may have Time for their Vices, none must have any leisure Time from their Works for the Exercise of Religion; for the same Time that the pious and religious do spend in the Exercise of Devotion, the same will the prophane and profligate spend in the sinful Lusts of the Flesh; the Consequence of which will be, that as then there will probably be less Vice and Looseness, less Rioting and Drunkenness, so there will be likewise less Religion, and less Devotion; for these can no more be practised without Time than the other. And, I doubt, the World, in the whole, would be then much worse than it is now; for it is better, that with a Mixture of bad, there should be some good Persons in the World, than that there should be none at all good in it; and none good there could be, if all Men were held to their Labours and their Burthens, without ceasing and without Intermission.

There is no Reason therefore, I think, that any Day of Religion, no Reason that this in particular should be abolished, only because some People are so wicked as to turn it into a Day of Intemperance and Sensuality; because the abolishing the Day would not alone serve to prevent the Wickedness that is acted upon it; it would but only put off the acting it from this Day, to some other Day; and in the mean Time, they that are devoutly inclined, would, by the Day's being laid aside, be deprived of an excellent Means of Religion, and Help to their Devotion; and that great Mystery of Godliness, which we now commemorate, God manifest in the Flesh, would more seldom be had in Remembrance and reflected upon; and in Time to come, this annual Memorial of it being destroyed and taken away, would be in Danger of being quite forgotten.

Thus much I thought it reasonable to say at this Time to justify the Wisdom and Piety of the Church, as well in still retaining the Observation of this great Festival, in Memory of the Birth of the King of Heaven, as in its first Institution; and that notwithstanding the ill Use that the prophane and licentious have made, and, it is likely, will still make of it.

But nothing can be said to justify their wicked Abuse of it; for, *Woe unto them, says the Prophet in the Text, that rise up early in the Morning that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night till Wine inflame them: And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts; but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.*

The proper Application of which Words to the great Festival that we at this Time celebrate, will be, I suppose, by shewing, *first*, what that Work of the Lord is which we ought at this Time to have Regard to, and to exercise our Meditations upon. *Secondly*, what Thoughts and Affections towards God the Consideration thereof is proper to work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives. And *thirdly*, and lastly, how very unsuitable to the Occasion of our present Joy and Thanksgiving, the Custom is, of those prophane and licentious Persons, who spend this Time in Rioting and Drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh; of all which very briefly.

1. Then, I shall briefly shew, what that Work of the Lord is, which we ought at this Time to have a special Regard to, and to exercise our Meditations upon. And this has been often already intimated; that Work of God which we are now more especially to consider, is his sending, as at this Time, his own Son into the World, for the Redemption of Mankind. And here we should do well to consider more particularly,

(1.) The Greatness and Dignity of the Person that was sent, the only begotten Son of God: He who was *the Brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person; upholding all Things by the Word of his* Heb. i. 3.

Power; that eternal $\Delta\omicron\gamma\varsigma$, of whom St. John speaking, says, *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the same was in the Beginning with God. All Things were made by him, and without him was not any Thing made that was made.* The Sense of which is very well expressed in the Creed commonly call'd the Nicene Creed, wherein declaring our Belief of this Article, we are taught to say, *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all Worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one Substance with the Father, and by whom all Things were made.* Such was the Person whose coming into the World we at this Time commemorate.

Phil. ii. 7.

 ἑαυτὸν κενώσας.

(2.) Another Thing proper to be now considered by us, is the Manner of his being sent; that he came not *in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels*, as he will come hereafter, when he shall return to judge the World; nay, that he came not with so much Glory as the Angels of Light had been used to appear in, when they were sent by God on some Message to Men; but *he emptied himself*, as the *Apostle* expresses it; he laid aside his Majesty and Glory; he divested himself for a while, not indeed of his eternal God-Head, for that could not be, but of the Glory which he had with his Father before all Worlds, *and took upon him the Form of a Servant, and was made in the Likeness of Men.* He whom the Heavens and the Heaven of Heavens could not contain, condescended, by assuming the human Nature, the Soul and Body of Man to himself, to be, as it were, circumscribed and limited within the same narrow Bounds that we are: *The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us*; and neither was his dwelling among us after the Manner of earthly Kings and Princes, with State and Magnificence, in Splendor and Plenty; but he appeared among us as one of the meanest of Men, as the Son of a Carpenter, of a Man who earned his living by his Labour; with whom also, until the Time that he began to preach, which was not till he was about thirty Years old, he is generally believed to have worked at the same Trade. Neither after that, was his Way of living advanced; for he had then no House of his own to lay his Head in, no Estate of his own to live upon, but was for the most Part maintained by Charity and Contribution. Was ever such Condescension before heard of? Or could it enter into the Heart of Man that such a Thing could be? Great indeed, might the *Apostle* well say, *is this Mystery of Godliness, God manifested in the Flesh.* But,

(3.) Another Thing proper to exercise our Meditation upon at this Season, is the End and Design of this Incarnation of the Son of God; which in general, was the Redemption of Mankind from that wretched, deplorable and desperate State, which by Sin they had plunged themselves into. *For this purpose*, saith the *Apostle*, *the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil*, 1 Joh. iii. 8. *And God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.* *For God sent not his Son into the World to condemn the World, but that the World thro' him might be saved:* So we are told by our *Saviour* himself, John iii. 16, 17. This was the gracious Design of God and our *Saviour*, in this wonderful and mysterious Undertaking; to make Peace for us, and to preach Peace to us; to reconcile us to God, and to save us from our Sins, and to redeem our Souls from Destruction.

In order to which, and as a Means of accomplishing which gracious Design; and that is another Thing proper to be now considered, and meditated upon;

(4.) He not only took upon him our Nature, in that to converse freely and familiarly with us, and to teach us both by his Precepts, and by his Example, the Way we were to take to be happy; but in this Nature united to the Divinity, he paid the Price of our Redemption, he gave his Life a Ransom

for all: For in him, as the *Apostle* says, *we have Redemption thro' his Blood,* Col. i. 14. *even the Forgiveness of Sins.* And this indeed seems to have been the main Design of his coming; the chief Reason for which it was necessary that he should become Man. For the same Precepts and Rules of holy Living might have been given by an Angel, or even by a mere Man inspired by God, and furnished with Power sufficient to prove his divine Mission, beyond all Contradiction; and the same excellent Example which he gave, was not, I suppose, impossible to have been given by another Man, assisted and strengthened unto all good, by the powerful Operation of the Holy Ghost. But to redeem lost Mankind, to satisfy the Justice of God, to make Peace between God and Men; that was what could not be done either by Angels or Men; that was what none could do but the Son of God: None but *He* could pay the Price of so large a Purchase; for no Creature's suffering could have been equivalent to the Destruction of the whole Race of Mankind, which was thereby to be bought off. For this Purpose therefore the Son of God assumed our Nature, that, an inestimable Value being added to his Suffering as a Man by the Union of the divine Nature with the human, he might *by one Oblation of himself once offered, make a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World.* This was what he came to do; this was what by his Incarnation, *i. e.* by his being manifested in the Flesh, he was capacitated to do; this was what he actually did do for us: *For,* Phil. ii. 8. *as the Apostle says, being found in Fashion as a Man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross.* And this is that wonderful Work of God, which we ought, now especially, to regard; this is that Operation of his Hands, which the present Festival calls upon us to consider.

But mere Meditation or Contemplation only is not a sufficient Commemoration of this great Mystery; unless we make it as useful and practical to our selves as we can. This therefore was the next Thing I propounded to do, *viz.*

2. To shew, what Thoughts and Affections towards God the Consideration of these Things should work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives.

(1.) What Thoughts and Affections of Mind towards God the Consideration of these Things should work in us.

And the natural Return for Love is Love: *If therefore God so loved the World, as to give his only begotten Son,* to take upon him the human Nature, in that to pass a wretched and painful Life, and to die an accursed Death for their Redemption, how can we chuse but love him again, and devote our selves Souls and Bodies entirely to his faithful Service? For *this,* as the *Apo-* 1 Joh. v. 3. *stle says, is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments;* we can testify and make Proof of our Love to God, no other Way. This therefore,

(2.) Is the Influence which the Consideration of that great Mystery of Godliness, which we now commemorate, should have upon our Lives; we should look upon our selves as the redeemed of the Lord, and not live any longer to our selves, but unto him that died for us; being *bought with a Price,* 1 Cor. vi. 20. *and that not with corruptible Things, as Silver and Gold, but with the pre-* 1 Pet. i. 18. *cious Blood of the Son of God made Man,* we should assert our Freedom from the Slavery of Sin and the Devil, and glorify God, both in our Body and in our Spirit, which are his.

And this leads me to the third and last Thing which I propounded to do, and wherewith I design to put an End to this Discourse, *viz.*

3. To shew, how very unsuitable to the Occasion of our present Joy and Thanksgiving, the Custom is of those prophane and licentious Persons, who spend this Time in Rioting and Drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh.

1. Joh. iii. 8. **Flesh.** For the Mystery we now commemorate is the Birth of the Son of God, *who was manifested for this Purpose, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil.* Can any Thing then be more absurd, than that we should spend the Time of this holy Festival in the Practice of those wicked Works which he came to destroy? The Blessing we now pretend to thank God for, is our Redemption from the Power of Sin, and the Dominion of Darkness: Can any Thing be more contradictory to this Pretence, than now at this very Time to sell our selves again to that Slavery from which we seem to rejoice that we were redeemed? *He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.* Is it not then a very unsuitable Way of commemorating this Benefit, that Iniquity should abound now, rather more than at other Times: And that our Love to God, and Zeal for his Service, should now be more cold, when it ought to be most flaming and operative? Is it not very absurd, that at this very Season set apart on Purpose to commemorate our Lord's Birth, and in the doing of which we pretend to be at this Time employed, we should so far forget, or so little consider, what was the Design of his Coming, as to live and act in the greatest possible Contradiction thereto; not only making this Festival an Occasion and Opportunity, but seeming likewise to think it an Excuse or Justification of our allowing our selves in such Irregularities and Extravagancies of Life and Behaviour, as we our selves should be ashamed of at any other Time?

Tit. ii. 14.

That this is the Manner of a great many People's keeping *Christmas*, I am sure I shall not need to tell you; but I hope better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation. I hope you do, and I pray God we all of us may, so regard the *Work of the Lord*, so seriously consider and reflect upon the Design of our *Saviour's* first Coming, as to keep this Feast in Remembrance thereof in a Manner agreeable to the Occasion of it, and likewise to order our whole Lives conformably thereunto; that so at his second Coming to judge the World, we may be found an acceptable People in his Sight, through the same our Lord *Jesus Christ*, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*



DISCOURSE CI.

The Subject's Duty.

Preached *March 8. 1704.* being the Day of Her Majesty's happy Accession to the Throne.

PROV. XXIV. 21.

My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to Change.



Know not how to begin a Discourse upon this Subject better, than in those Words wherewith the judicious Mr. Hooker begins his learned Discourse of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy*: "He, says he, that goes about to persuade a Multitude that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable Hearers; because they know the manifold Defects whereunto every Kind of Regiment is subject, but

"the secret Lets and Difficulties, which in publick Proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the Judgment to consider. And because such as openly reprove supposed Disorders of State, are taken for principal Friends to the common Benefit of all, and for Men that carry singular Freedom of Mind; under this fair and plausible Colour, whatsoever they utter passes for good and current; that which is wanting in the Weight of their Speech, being supplied by the Aptness of Mens Minds to accept and believe it. Whereas, on the other Side, if we maintain Things that are established, we have not only to strive with a Number of heavy Prejudices deeply rooted in the Hearts of Men, who think that herein we serve the Time, and speak in Favour of the present State, because thereby we either hold or seek Preferment; but also to bear such Exceptions as Minds so averted before-hand usually take against that which they are loth should be poured into them.

But what would not be so well taken from me, will, I hope, be better taken when coming out of the Mouth of a very wise Man; and such an one you will surely all acknowledge *Solomon* to have been. And he it was, (it

was he who excelled in Wisdom all that were before him, and all that have lived since;) or rather, it was *Wisdom* it self speaking by his Mouth, which has given this Advice in the Text, which I would now persuade you to follow: *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to Change.*

Concerning which it may be first observed in general, that it is given here as a *Father's* Advice to his *Son*; *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King*; and from hence we may reasonably conclude that it is very good Advice, and that to follow it will be very much for our own Profit and Advantage: For that is the only End that a Father has in the Counsel and Instruction that he gives his Son; he never means any thing by it but his Son's Good; he never advises his Son to any Thing, but what he thinks it will be for his Interest to do: And whenever he ushers in any Advice in such Manner as this here is introduced, with a solemn and particular Compellation, serving to excite and fix the Attention to what follows; *My Son, do this*; or, *My Son, do that*; it is very reasonable to suppose, that he judges the Advice which he is then about to give, to be Matter of the greatest Usefulness and Importance; it is a Sign that it is what he would have his Son take a special Regard to, and be very careful to observe. And such is, most manifestly, the Counsel which the wise Father here gives to his Son; it is concerning Matters of the highest Importance, and of the nearest Concern to every Man; *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to Change.*

I. For that the first Branch of this Advice is such, will, I suppose, be readily granted by all, *My Son, fear thou the Lord*; for the *Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom*; the Fear of God induces and comprehends our whole Duty to him: If we fear God as we ought to do, and as a good Son fears his Father, we shall readily obey him in every Command that he lays upon us. Nay, this comprehends all our Duty, not only to God, but to Men too, to whom we are to perform all the Offices of our Relation to them for God's sake, and out of a Principle of Conscience and Obedience to God. Of this *Fear of God* then we may say, as our *Saviour* does of the *Love of God*, and we may truly say it, for indeed the *Love of God*, and the *Fear of God*, are in Substance the same; that it is *the first and great Commandment*; which if we are careful to keep, according to its true and comprehensive Meaning, we shall be deficient in no Part of Duty.

II. But the second Branch of the wise Father's Advice to his Son is also, next to the former, of the highest Importance, and of the nearest Concern, *Fear the King*; *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King*. By which is meant, that our next Care to that of keeping a good Conscience towards God, should be that of behaving our selves orderly and regularly in that Station which God has placed us in, of Subordination and Subjection to those Men that are set over us by God, with a Power to order and enact such Constitutions, only not contrary to the divine Laws, as are necessary to conserve Justice and Peace in that Society over which they preside: *Fear the King*, that is, "Obey him, keep his Laws, and behave thy self in all Things as a dutiful Subject towards him; or if thou canst not with a good Conscience obey his Commands, yet do not dare to resist his Authority. If what he commands be lawful, do readily as thou art commanded: Or if it be not lawful, which may sometimes be; for the Laws of Men are not always agreeable to the Laws of God; yet even in that Case, thou art not discharged from thy Subjection to him; for when thou canst not obey, thou must submit; and that not only because thou canst not help it, but although

“ although thou couldst; if thou canst not do as he bids thee, thou must.
“ take patiently the Punishment that is imposed upon thee for thy Dis-
“ obedience.

This is the Duty of Subjects to their Governors, as it is briefly taught in the Text, *fear the King*: And more largely in other Places of holy Scripture; as in *Eccles. viii. 2. I counsel thee to keep the King's Commandment, and that in Regard of the Oath of God*: In *Rom. xiii. Let every Soul be subject unto the higher Powers; for there is no Power but of God; the Powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves Damnation. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for Wrath, but also for Conscience sake. And in 1 Pet. ii. 13. Submit yourselves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the King as Supreme, or unto Governors as unto them that are sent by him, for the Punishment of Evil-doers and for the Praise of them that do well. For so is the Will of God, that with Well-doing ye may put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men. As free, and not using your Liberty for a Cloke of Maliciousness, but as the Servants of Christ. Honour all Men; love the Brotherhood; fear God; honour the King.*

This, I say, is the Duty, as it is plainly taught in Scripture, of Subjects to their Governors; that is, to them who have the supreme Authority of the Nation to which they belong, by whatsoever Name or Title they are called; that is, to the *Legislative Power*, in what Hands soever it is lodged by the particular Constitution of the Place. For there may be, and in some Countries there is, the Name and Title of a King, without the Power; and there may be, and in some other Countries there is, the Power of a King, without the Name: Nay, there is indeed in every Country, State, Kingdom, or Commonwealth, the kingly or the supreme Power lodged somewhere or other, either in one, in few, or in more Hands: This Power, I say, there is in the Government of every Nation, as well in a Democracy, or Aristocracy, as in a Monarchy; and as well in the most limited Monarchy, as in that which is the most arbitrary and absolute; and I say, it is this *kingly Power*, wherever it is by the Constitution seated or lodged, that is to be feared and obeyed: For the Scripture only declares in general, the Duties of Governors to their Subjects, and of Subjects to their Governors; but it does not expressly define or prescribe any one Form or Manner of Government, as necessary to be set up and preserved in all Nations; but leaves every Country to it self to establish that Form of Government which is most suitable to its own particular Temper and Genius. Only when any Sort of Government is set up and established, there being, as was said before, in every Form of Government, a kingly, that is, an absolute and arbitrary Power lodged somewhere or other, either in one Hand or in more; it then commands Obedience, and forbids Resistance to this sovereign Power: It commands Submission to this Power, as to the *Ordinance of God, for there is no Power but of God, and the Powers that be are ordained of God*; and it declares, that they that being placed in Subjection to this Power, do make Resistance to it, *resist the Ordinance of God, and shall receive to themselves Damnation.*

And thus much of the second Branch of the wise Man's Advice to his Son; *My Son, fear thou the King*. But before I come to speak of the third, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*, I think it may be of good Use to make some brief Observations upon the two former Branches of it, considered as given together in the same Breath, as connected with each other, as depending one upon the other; *fear the Lord, and the King.*
And,

1. From the Order in which these two Branches of his Advice are placed, *Fear thou the Lord, and the King*; it may be observed, that God is to be first feared, then the King; or that God is to be more feared than the King; that no Power upon Earth has Authority to make Laws contrary to the divine Laws, or to discharge its Subjects from those Obligations which were before laid upon them by the Law of God. This is so evident, that the *Apostles*, when they had been charged by the *Jewish Sanhedrim* to forbear preaching in the Name of *Jesus*, *Acts* iv. 16, 17. to do which they had before received a Command from God, boldly appealed even to the Council themselves, to judge, and declare, whether in such Case their Order ought to be obeyed; as knowing that they themselves would not dare to affirm, that a human Law could evacuate or set by a contrary Law of God. *Ver.* 19. *Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

2. From the Advice of fearing and obeying the King, being immediately subjoined to that of fearing God, and both being given as it were in the same Breath, *Fear the Lord, and the King*; it may be observed, that our highest Obligation, next to that of obeying God, is to obey and submit our selves to those whom God has made his Deputies and Viceroy's here upon Earth: And this is the Relation wherein earthly Kings, that is, the sovereign Powers of every State or Nation, do stand to God; *By me Kings reign; by me Princes rule*; so we are told, *Prov.* viii. 15, 16. *The Most High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*; so we are taught, *Dan.* iv. 32. *And There is no Power but of God; the Powers that be are ordained of God*; says the Apostle. And again, *He is the Minister of God to thee for Good: he is the Minister of God, an Avenger to execute Wrath upon him that doeth Evil.* And from this Relation wherein the supreme Powers of every Nation do stand to God, they themselves are sometimes in Scripture called *Gods*; they are said to *judge, not for Man, but for the Lord*; and the Judgment that they give, is called *God's Judgment*. Having therefore a Sort of God-like Power communicated to them by God, it is but fit that, next to God, they should be had in the highest Honour by their Subjects; and that after the Care of Religion, the Subjects next chiefest Care should be to behave themselves dutifully to those whom God has set over them, in order to preserve Peace and Justice in the World; *Fear the Lord, and the King.*

3. From the Connexion that is made in the Text, between these two Duties, the Fear of God, and of the King, it may be farther observed, and most certainly inferred, that they are not repugnant and contradictory, nay, that they are very consistent with each other. So that a good Man may both fear God and the King too; and there can never be a Necessity lying upon any Man from his Obligation to discharge one of these Duties, to neglect or transgress the other. It is not therefore true Loyalty, but Cowardice, or Worldly-mindedness, that ever makes Men give up their Religion and Conscience to the Humour of their Prince; and yield a blind Obedience, without Reserve or Exception, to all his Commands, how unjust, how unreasonable, how ungodly and irreligious soever they be; for such Submission as this to the Will of Princes, is a manifest Contradiction to the first Branch of the Advice here given, *Fear the Lord*. And on the other Side, it is not true Religion, and a well-informed Conscience, but an ignorant and misguided Zeal, or a Form of Godliness without the Power of it, that ever turns Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction; that ever arms Subjects against their Sovereign, that ever deposes Princes, and unsettles the State, and disturbs the Peace and Order of the World: This is as manifest a

Rom. xiii. 1.
Ver. 4.

Exod. xxii. 28.
2 Chr. xix. 6.
Deut. i. 17.

Contradiction to the second Branch of the Advice, *fear the King*; *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King*; we may certainly do both these, or else both would not have been commanded. But it is a Thing too evident to be denied, that the Laws of Princes are not always conformable to the Laws of God; and when they are not so, it is impossible that they should be both complied with by an active Obedience: For, as our Saviour says, *No Man can serve two Masters*; to be sure, not two, whose Commands are repugnant and contradictory. In this Case therefore, Subjects are not in Duty bound to do as they are commanded by their Governors; and yet neither in this Case does the Precept enjoining them to *fear the King*, become void and of none Effect; only it then ties them to an Obedience of another Sort; that is, to a Submission of themselves to suffer the Punishment of that Law which they could not with a good Conscience yield an active Obedience to: Still the King, that is, the sovereign civil Power, must be feared; and he is feared and obeyed as much as in this Case he ought to be, when his Authority is not resisted, when, *out of Conscience towards God, we endure Grief, suffering wrongfully*; for, as the Apostle says, *hereunto are we called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example that we should follow his Steps; and so is the Will of God, that with well-doing we should put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men.* But,

1 Pet. ii. 21.

Ver. 15.

4. Lastly, What may be farther observed and argued from the *Connexion* that seems to be here made between these two first Branches of the wise Man's Advice, *My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King*, is this; that Religion towards God is the best and surest Ground of Loyalty and due Obedience to the King. He that fears God as he ought to do, will also fear the King for God's sake, and because God has commanded him so to do; his Loyalty will be a Part of his Religion; and he, for the same Reason for which he will be ever at all loyal, will be always so: But he that honours his Prince upon any other Principle, will honour him no more, nor no longer, than while he finds his own Interest in it; he flatters his King, but he is no true Friend to him; he serves him only for Reward, and will be as ready to betray as to serve him, when he can get more by that than by this.

III. And now I come to speak of the third Branch of the wise Father's Advice to his Son; *Meddle not with them that are given to Change.* In Order to the Explication of which, it may be needful to inquire,

1. Who they are that may be said to be *given to Change.* And,
2. What it is to *meddle* with such Men.

But before I do these Things, I think it will be expedient, both to prevent any Misunderstanding of what shall be said, and likewise for some other good Purposes, to take particular Notice to *whom* it is that the Advice, in the Text, *not to meddle with such as are given to Change*, is directed; *My Son, meddle not with them that are given to Change.*

And here it may be considered, that the Giver of this Advice was *Solomon*, who was himself King over *Israel*, who had himself the whole kingly Power, in whom solely, and without any Partner or Sharer in the Government, the whole sovereign Authority of the Nation, both legislative and executive, was lodged; for this, you know, was the Constitution among the *Jews*, the whole Sovereignty was in the King alone: Counsellors he might have, but they had no Share with him in the Legislature, for it was at his free Election to take their Advice or not; and what he enacted, whether with their Advice or without it, was good Law. Such a King, I say, was

Solomon, who gives this Counsel, *not to meddle with such as are given to Change*; and it is evident that he gives the Advice to *another*, not to himself; he gives it to *his Son*, who was a Subject, not to himself, who was an absolute and a sovereign Prince. He gives it to the *same Person* whom, in the Clause just before, he had commanded to *fear the King*; therefore to be sure, not to the King himself, but to such only as were in Subjection to him.

And what I argue and infer from hence, is this, that the Advice in the Text, *not to be given to Change*, nor *to meddle with such as are given to Change*, though as a Matter of *Prudence* it may concern all, King as well as People; the supreme Governors of a Nation, as well as those who are under Government: Yet as a Matter of *Duty*, it can and must belong only to such as are in Subjection; that is, only to the People and Subjects. For though, as the *Apostle* says, *there is no Power but of God, and the Powers that be are ordained of God*, that is, though the Power which they have is a Portion of the divine Power; yet there is no one particular Form of Government, that can truly be said to be of divine Institution and Appointment; and if there be not, then there is no one Form of Government, but what may be changed and altered, provided that they who make the Change have sufficient Authority to make it: And sufficient Authority he or they must be allowed to have, to make any such Change or Alteration in the Form and Manner of the Government, who has, or who have for the Time being, the supreme and sovereign Authority in that Nation wherein such Change is made. For the sovereign Authority of every State or Nation, whether it be lodged in one Hand, or in many, is, and in the Nature of the Thing must needs be, absolute, unlimited, and uncontrollable: That which is the highest Authority in any Nation, may do what it pleases; and because it is the highest upon Earth, can be accountable to none but God for what it does. This sovereign Authority therefore, I say, may make what Changes and Alterations it self pleases, in the Frame and Constitution of the Government; and whatever Changes it makes, they are lawful and valid, provided that no natural Right of any other Man be thereby invaded and violated.

Supposing therefore Government to be founded originally in the paternal or patriarchal Right, yet if that single Person in whom the whole sovereign Power was lodged by this Right, either to give Ease to himself, finding the Weight of the Government too heavy for himself to bear alone; or to give Ease to his People, finding that it is with great Unwillingness and Reluctance that they submit to be governed by his sole Will and Pleasure, or for any good Cause and Consideration him thereunto moving, shall think fit to call to his Assistance any of his Subjects, constituting them his standing Council, and declaring and enacting, that he will do nothing without them, and that no Act or Law of his, done without their Approbation, shall be of Force and binding to his Subjects: From this Time forward the whole Frame and Constitution of the Government will be clearly altered, and that which was before an absolute, will thenceforward become a limited or mixed Monarchy; and this Change in the Constitution, being made by him that had the sovereign Power, will be good and valid; neither will it be lawful for him to re-assume again, without Consent of this Council, that Portion of the Sovereignty which he had before freely parted with, and transferred to them.

And if, the Government being thus settled, the sovereign Power for the Time being, that is, this King with his Council, shall both agree to make a farther Alteration in it; if they shall *both* agree to lay aside their own Superiority,

Superiority, and to devolve the sovereign Power that is then lodged in them, on the People; and shall enact and declare, that no Law shall be good and valid, but what the Majority of the Populace shall agree to; by this, that Government, which was at first an absolute, and afterwards a limited Monarchy, will become a perfect Commonwealth; and after that they shall have thus transferred the whole Government upon the People, and freely parted with their own Right to it, it will be unjust in them to re-assume this Power, any otherwise than by the free Gift of the People on whom they had transferred it.

And on the other Side, the Case will be exactly the same, if it be supposed, that the Right of Government was originally in the People; for still it will be capable of the like Changes and Alterations: The Sovereignty, wherever it is lodged, may be alienated and parted with to others. If therefore the Sovereignty being, as is now supposed, lodged in the People, they, finding the Inconveniencies of numerous popular Assemblies, shall think fit to transfer this Power to some few Persons delegated and chosen by themselves; from this Time forward these Delegates or Representatives of the People are the supreme Power, and the People become mere Subjects to them, and may not forcibly take again to themselves that Power which they have freely parted with. And again, If this representative Body of the People, in which the Sovereignty will be then lodged, finding the Inconveniencies of this Sort of Government, by Reason of the Factions they are subject to, shall think fit to make Choice of one single Person, to preside and moderate in their Assembly, with a negative or a casting Vote, or with what farther Degree of Power they shall think convenient to bestow upon him: This is a farther Alteration of the Manner of the Government; because, what Power they give him, they give from themselves, and may not challenge or claim it back again as their Due, after they have freely parted with it: And when they do choose such a Governor, they may choose him upon what Conditions, they may constitute him with what Limitations they please; they may, if they will, appoint him only for a Year, or other limited Time; or they may, if they think that better, appoint him for Life; or they may, if they are so minded, order that the Power which they give him shall descend to his Heirs after him; and they may call him King, or Duke, or Stadtholder, or give him whatever other Title they shall think better. And if after this, finding Inconveniencies in this mixed Sort of Government, they in whom the supreme Power is then lodged, that is, this King, or Duke, or whatever else he is called, with his Council or Parliament, shall both agree together to make a farther Alteration in the Government; if they shall agree to transfer the whole Sovereignty to him, and he shall consent to accept of it, and they do both by a solemn Act decree and ordain this Establishment; that Government which was at first a Democracy, and after that a mixed Monarchy, will thenceforward become an absolute Monarchy; and any of all these Changes or Alterations in the Form or Manner of Government, being made by such as, for the Time being, were lawfully possessed of the sovereign Power, will be regularly made; and being once made, will be valid and binding: And in whatsoever Hands the Sovereignty shall be thus regularly placed, it cannot be regularly taken from thence again, but by his or their own Cession or Consent.

Thus, I think it is evident, that no Change or Alteration of the Form of Government, from one Sort to another, is in it self unlawful to be made, provided it be made by those who have Power to make it; that is, by the Government it self; I mean, by him, or them, who, for the Time being,

ing, have the sovereign Power in their Hands; because, as I said before, there is no one Sort or Form of Government, that can truly be said to be of divine Institution. The Power of Government indeed, that is, the Power and Authority that Governors have, is from God: *By me*, says he, *Kings reign, and Princes decree Justice*; and, *there is no Power but of God*, says the *Apostle*; but the Designation and Appointment of particular Persons to the Administration of the Government, this is human; and the Distribution of the Power of Government into one, or into more Hands, this is likewise human: This is the Ordinance of Man only, and whatever is ordained by Man, is in its own Nature alterable, and may at any Time be altered, by the same Power that ordained it. I do not say, it may be altered by the same Persons that ordained it; for it is possible that by such Ordinance the Power may be transferred from one Person to another, and what Power any Man has once given away from himself to another, he cannot reclaim as in Right; he may receive it again as a Gift from him to whom he gave it, but he cannot challenge it again as his Due. I say therefore, I do not affirm, that whatever has been ordained by Man, may be altered by the same Persons that ordained it; I only affirm, that it may be altered by the same Power that ordained it. I affirm, that the same human Power which has settled the Sovereignty in one Hand, may distribute it into several Hands; or if it has settled it in many Hands, it may take it thence, and give it into one Hand. That same human Power which has made the Persons of such as have the Administration of the Government elective, may ordain that they shall be successive: That same human Power that can settle a Crown in Entail, can also cut off the Entail of a Crown: That same human Power that can settle the Succession of a Crown unconditionally, may appoint Conditions, without performing which, he that is next Heir in Course shall not inherit: And whatever Establishment of the Government the supreme and sovereign Power of any Nation makes in one Age, the supreme and sovereign Power for the Time being, of the same Nation, may in the next Age make null and void. For the supreme Power of every Nation is, and must needs be, in every Age, lodged somewhere or other; and the highest Power for the Time being, may, for its own Time, make what Laws and Ordinances it self pleases, as to the Settlement and Administration of the Government; which will be good Laws till they are repealed. But then the same sovereign Power which has Authority to make a Law, has, and always must have, as much Authority to repeal it; and no one Generation of Men can ever in such Matters so bind the Hands, and restrain the Power of the Generations to come, but that they, in their Time, will have the same full Power to order publick Affairs according to their own Liking, that the present Generation has. There being therefore no mere human Constitution, but what in its own Nature is alterable; and I now take it for granted, that the particular Form or Manner of any Government is a mere human Constitution, it plainly follows, that the Precept in the Text, forbidding *to change*, or *to meddle with those that are given to Change*, is not given to the supreme legislative Power, which may make what Changes in the Form of Government it thinks reasonable; but only to mere Subjects, whose Duty it is to be quiet, and to submit to the Powers that be; and who will act out of their Sphere, and in a Matter above their Capacity, in Case they shall take upon them to unsettle that Form of Government, whatever it is, that is already established, or to frame and set up a new one.

The supreme legislative Power, wherever lodged, is therefore no otherwise concerned in this Precept, than only as in a Matter of Prudence: And so far indeed they are very nearly concerned in it; it being rarely that any considerable Change can be made in the Form of a Government that has been long established, and under which the Commonwealth has prospered and flourished, without more Danger of Hurt than Hope of Good to the Community: An Alteration in the Government being like a Reparation in the Foundation of an House, which if it be necessary to be made, must be made, and yet unless it be made very cautiously, cannot be done without endangering the Downfall of the whole Fabrick. Whenever therefore the supreme Power of any Nation undertakes to make any Change in the established Form of Government, they ought in Prudence to be very well satisfied that such a Change is necessary; and they ought likewise wisely to foresee all the Consequences that may probably follow from such a Change, and to be well assured, that there will be more Good than Hurt in it: But when they are well satisfied in this, they may then, without any Breach of Duty or Justice, make such Alterations therein as they judge needful; they do no more than they have full Power and Authority to do, in making such a Change, and it is the Duty of Subjects to acquiesce in the Wisdom of their Superiors.

And the Reason why I have now mentioned, and insisted so largely upon this Point is, as I have already hinted, not only in Order to give you the true Meaning, as I conceive, of this Precept, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*; but likewise to give Ease and Satisfaction to the Consciences of Men, as to some Alterations that have been lately made in the Government of our own Nation.

For you all know, I shall not need to tell you, that the supreme legislative Power of this Nation, is by the Constitution lodged in the King or Queen for the Time being, and in the two Houses of Parliament; that what is enacted by their joint Authority, is a Law of the Land, to which they do all three give their Consent: And in this essential and most fundamental Constitution of the Government, there has not, God be thanked, been made, and I hope never will be made, any Change or Alteration. But as to the Succession to the Crown, there have been of late made some very considerable Limitations; and well had it been for the Nation, if the same had been made an hundred Years sooner. For whereas formerly the Crown descended of Course to the next in Blood, without any Exception, Condition, or Limitation; it is now limited* to descend to the next Heir that is a Protestant; and thereby not only one Person in particular, who is of uncertain Birth, but likewise several others of the Popish Religion, of whose Legitimacy there has been no Doubt, are debarred and excluded from the Succession: And it is also declared to be a Forfeiture of the Crown, for any one that is possessed of it, to be reconciled to the Church of *Rome*, or to marry with a Papist.

Now this, you know, is what some amongst us are stumbled at: First, such a Change, they think, ought not to have been made; and, secondly, now that it is made, they think, it is null and invalid.

But the first of these is a Point which I am at present no ways concerned to enquire into; neither, I think, are you: They that have Power to make such a Change are the best, they are indeed the only proper Judges of the Prudence, the Reason, the Necessity of it.

* 1 W. & M. Seff. 2. Cap. 2. 12 W. III.

All therefore that I am concerned to do, in Order to give Ease and Satisfaction to the Consciences of those Subjects who have any Doubts or Scruples about the Matter, is only to shew, that they who made this Alteration, as to the Succession of the Crown, had Power sufficient to make it, and consequently that now it is made, it is valid and binding; so that all those who are obliged by Law to declare, as all Persons in Place and Office now are, that they do not believe, that any Person hath now any Right or Title to the Crown of this Realm, otherwise than according to this Settlement of the Succession, may safely and with a good Conscience make this Declaration.

For this I take to be an undoubted Truth, that no Man has a *natural Right* to any Thing in this World, more than to the Necessaries of Life: Whatever Right any Man has to Estate, or Dignity, or Dominion, except only over the Fruit of his own Body, is merely human; that is, it is a Right that is given by the Law of the Land, or the Constitution of the Realm; thus, that the eldest Son should inherit all his Father's real Estate, is no Law of Nature; for by Nature all his Children have Right alike: And even here with us, where this is the general Law of Inheritance, yet there are real Estates in some Places, that descend after another Manner, all to the younger Son, or to all Sons alike; and in some other Countries perhaps, the whole real Estate of every Person, after the Decease of the Possessor, may revert to the Crown from which it was granted, and the Exchequer, or publick Treasury, may be also the sole Heir to his personal Estate. And if no Man has a natural Right to an Estate, much less can he have a natural Right to Government; I mean, out of his own Family: It is the supreme Power of every Nation that gives this Right to whom it pleases, and in such Manner as it pleases: It is this supreme Power of every Nation that establishes in several Nations a different Sort of Government, and which in Monarchies makes the Crown of one Nation to be elective, and of another successive; and which, in hereditary Monarchies, excludes, in one Country, all the Females and their Issue; and, in another Country, admits the next in Blood to inherit, whether Male or Female, and in the same Proximity of Blood, prefers the Male before the Female. And I never yet heard it offered to be proved, that any of these Conditions or Limitations of Succession to a Crown, were Breaches of a Law of Nature, or Violations of a natural Right.

Now therefore, if this be true, that no Man has a natural Right to the Government of a Kingdom, it remains, that the only Right which any Person hath thereto, must be a legal Right, that is, such a Right as is given him by the Law and Constitution of the Realm; and the Law can give no Right any longer than while it self is in Force; and the same sovereign legislative Power that can make a Law, has as much Authority to repeal a Law; and the Law which gives any such Right, being by sufficient Authority repealed, the Right which was solely founded upon that Law, must needs become null and void: For the Right having no other Foundation but that Law, that Foundation being removed by the Repeal of the Law, the Right that was built upon that, and nothing else, must needs fall to the Ground.

To me therefore it seems very plain, that whatever Right, either that particular Person, of the Legitimacy of whose Birth there is so much Doubt, or any other Person or Persons whatsoever, that are nearer of Kin to the Crown, than that Family is on which it is now entailed, had or might be supposed to have had, in Case there had been no Change made in the Laws relating to the Succession, it is by the Change that has been
now

now made in those Laws clearly cut off and destroyed; so that now we may truly declare, that neither he nor they, who by this last Law are excluded, have any Right or Title whatsoever to the Crown of this Realm: For no Right ever had they, or could they have, but by Law, and the Law has now given this Right from them to others; and the supreme legislative Power of the present Time, has certainly as much Power and Authority to grant this Right of Succession to whom it will, as the same legislative Power of the former Times had.

So that I think no Person can now have any reasonable Doubt of the Lawfulness of making this *Declaration*, which all in Places and Offices are bound to make, unless he doubts whether this last Law, so limiting the Succession to the Crown, be a Law of the Land; that is, whether it was enacted by the supreme legislative Power of the Nation, *viz.* the King and the Two Houses of Parliament, in whom, according to our present Constitution, the supreme legislative Power is most certainly lodged. And to him who has any Doubt in his Mind, whether or no this be a Law of the Land, I have little to say but this, that if he himself do not remember the making of the Law, which I suppose most of us do, he may look into the Statute Book, and see if it be not there printed with the rest; or he may, if he has still a Mind to be more certain of it, search the Records, and see if the original Act be not there entred and kept, as one of the Laws and Statutes of this Realm. Or if this will not satisfy, I leave him to be told by the *Lawyers*, for it is not within my Profession to tell him that, that according to the Constitution of our Government, as it now is, and as it has been for several Hundred Years past, the King for the Time being in Possession of the Crown, and recognized and acknowledged by the States of the Realm, is, without farther Enquiry into other Titles, lawful and rightful King, at least so far, as that an Act of Parliament passed by him is a good and valid Law: This I suppose the Lawyers will tell him; this, I am sure, they must say, or else they must grant, that well nigh half the Statutes, not only of the present, but of former Times, according to which they plead, and according to which the civil Rights of the Subjects are judicially determined, are not good Laws and Statutes.

Thus I think I have made it appear, that this Precept, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*, does not teach the Duty of sovereign Powers, who may lawfully make what Changes and Alterations in the Frame and Constitution of the Government they themselves think fit; but only of Subjects, whose Duty it is to be quiet and contented in their Station, and to submit to that Form of Government which is established, believing, as the *Apostle* teaches, that *there is no Power but of God*, that *the Powers that be are ordained of God*; that *whosoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God*; and that *they that resist shall receive to themselves Damnation*.

And now I come to speak very briefly to the two Points before proposed to be spoken to, in Order to the Explication of the third and last Branch of the wise Man's Advice to his Son, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*, *viz.* to enquire, 1. who they are that may be said to be *given to Change*; and, 2. what it is to *meddle with such Men*.

(1.) Who they are that may be said to be *given to Change*. And,

1. First of all, this they certainly are, who are uneasy in that State of Subjection which God has placed them in, who think themselves better able to govern the Kingdom, than those are in whose Hands Providence has deposited this Care; for they who have this Conceit of themselves,

and

and yet according to the present Establishment are never like to be called to the Government, or to any Share of it, cannot but wish the Destruction of the present Establishment, in Order to make Room for themselves to come in. *O that I were made Judge in the Land, that every Man which hath any Suit or Cause might come unto me, and I would do him Justice!* So said Absalom, 2 Sam. xv. 4. He thought the Administration of the Government not so well managed by his Father David, as it would be by himself; and this fond Self-Conceit naturally put him upon endeavouring to dethrone his Father, and to place himself in his Room.

2. They may be said to be *given to Change*, and do sufficiently shew that they are so, who though they do not express such an high Opinion of themselves, yet are ever expressing a very low and mean Opinion of those in whose Hands the Government is placed; who make it their Business to pry into, and enquire out all the Oversights or Miscarriages of the present Administration; and what Government is there, or ever was there, so perfect, in which there have not been some Oversights or Miscarriages? who set themselves to divulge and spread abroad all the ill Things they know, or have heard of, concerning their Governors; who on all Occasions magnify every little Failing, aggravate every small Miscarriage, judge of the Prudence of every Undertaking, by its Success; and if any Enterprise that is taken in Hand miscarries, will never suffer such Unsuccessfulness to be attributed to Chance, or Providence, or any other Cause, but either to gross Ignorance or Unskilfulness, or wilful Male-Administration. For to what Purpose is all such Talk, but only to discontent Men's Minds, to render them uneasy in their Station, and to dispose them to attempt a Revolution? They who allow themselves to talk at this Rate, have, it may be, too much Wit to venture the burning of their own Fingers; but if they can influence and persuade others to it, that will answer their End as well: If they can but move others to Mutiny and Sedition, they make no Doubt but they shall afterwards find good fishing for themselves in the troubled Waters; and that if they can but influence the ignorant and easily mis-guided Multitude to pull others down, they shall afterwards be able with Ease to set themselves up.

3. They may yet more truly be said to be *given to Change*, at least they do more plainly shew themselves to be so, who if they can find no Faults in the Administration of publick Affairs, do without Scruple make them; who set themselves to forge and frame any Lies that may do Hurt concerning the Counsels, the Actions, or the Persons of their Governors; in order to possess Men's Minds with unreasonable Fears and Jealousies, thereby to render the Persons of their Governors odious, and their Government weak and precarious. But,

4. They especially are most evidently *given to Change*, or rather they are more than given to it, they are actually attempting it; who in Case of any, whether true or supposed, Disorders of State, go out of their own Way and Sphere to rectify or redress them; and this they certainly do, who, being mere Subjects, do use any other Means to get their Grievances redressed, than only Prayers and Tears. What Power they may exert for this Purpose, who have any Portion or Share of the Legislature vested in them, as with us each House of Parliament manifestly has, I will not take upon me to say; they know best the Extent of their own Power, and upon what Occasions, and in what Degrees it is necessary or proper to exert it, in Order to preserve the Balance that is established by the Constitution. But it is manifestly irregular, for mere private
Subjects

Subjects to gather together in Tumults, or to break out into open Rebellion against the sovereign Power, on Pretence of doing themselves Right. This is a considerable Advance towards a Change, and in Probability, how oppressive soever the present Government is, towards a Change much for the worse: The Miseries of Anarchy, Confusion, and Civil War, being commonly much greater, and more universally felt, than the Miseries occasioned by the Tyranny and Oppression of any Government.

These are such as may be said to be *given to Change*. And,

(2.) They who may truly be said to *meddle with those that are given to Change*, are such who give them any Manner of Encouragement in this their irregular Proceeding; that is, who gladly give Ear to their uncharitable, malicious, and false Reports; who love to hear the Government blackned and defamed; who are well pleased that the Mischief is done by other Hands, which they themselves, for their own Safety's sake, were afraid to undertake. They do give them still greater Encouragement, who suffer themselves to be cheated into an Opinion of such Men's Honesty, by the loud Pretences that they make of Zeal for Liberty and Religion: Indeed, were it not for such abused and misled People as these, no Sedition would ever be very formidable. But they, above all, may most truly be said to *meddle with such as are given to Change*, who join and take Part with such whose open Design it is, no Matter upon what specious Pretences, to dissolve the present Government, and to set up a new one: They who do thus meddle with such as are *given to Change*, are no whit better than those are whom they join with, and may justly expect the same Reward, even that mentioned in the Verse following the Text: *Their Calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the Ruin of them both?*

I shall observe but one Thing more, concerning the Precept in the Text, I mean, the two last Branches of it; *fear the King*, and, *meddle not with them that are given to Change*: And this I shall do, only in Order to deduce one very just, and I think also useful, and very seasonable Inference from the whole, and so conclude.

It is this: That these two Branches of the wise Man's Advice, as they are given to none but Subjects; for the King himself is not to fear the King, and they who have the Power of the Government may lawfully, as I have shewed already, not only attempt, but make Changes in it, if they see Cause; so they are plainly given to *all* that are mere Subjects; and that whether the King be so good a King as they could wish for or no, or whether the Government be as gentle and perfect as it might be or not. For the Text takes no Notice of the personal Qualifications of the King, neither of his Wisdom and Virtue, nor of his Want of them, nor yet of the Excellencies or Imperfections of the Government; but it speaks in general of any King for the Time being, when it commands Subjects to fear their King: And it speaks of any Sort or Kind of Government, that for the Time being is regularly established, when it forbids the Subjects to meditate or endeavour the making Alterations in it.

Now if it be the Duty of Subjects to fear their King, even though he be not so good an one as they could wish; and not to project or undertake to make any Change in the Government, even though it be for the better; for that to be sure is what all such Medlers do think, at least it is what they will not fail to give out: If it be the Duty of mere Subjects to take these Things as they find them, because none can regularly go about even to reform the Government, but the sovereign Power,

or at least only such Persons as have some Share of the Sovereignty lodged in them; and then only according to that Measure thereof which they have, and within those Bounds which are set to their Power by the Constitution; much rather are all mere Subjects bound, both in Duty, and also in Interest, to fear and obey a good and gracious Sovereign, and not only to be quiet and contented, but very thankful too, if they have the Happiness to be under a Government that cannot be mended, a Government that seems as perfect as a human Constitution can be. And this, God be thanked, is, in both these Respects, manifestly our Case at this present Time. For,

1. As to the Constitution of our Government, that is certainly the best in the whole World: The *Utopians* would be hard put to it so much as to imagine a better: It is a Constitution wherein the Power of the Sword is fully lodged in the Sovereign, and yet with all the Security that can be that it shall never be misused; whereby the Rights and Prerogatives of the Crown, and the Liberties and Properties of the People, are with equal Care preserved; wherein the Sovereign has all the Power that can be to do Good, and none to do Hurt. In a Word, it is a Constitution, during the Continuance whereof, the People can never be enslaved and ruined, but with their own Consent, by Representatives of their own choosing; and it may be reasonably hoped, that they will never be so foolish as to give their Consent to their own Destruction. And yet,

2. If this might be supposed, we should nevertheless be safe from present Ruin, having (God be thanked, and on this Day of Her Majesty's happy Accession to the Crown we have, more especially, Reason to be thankful for it; having, I say,) such a Sovereign now on the Throne, as might safely be trusted with the highest and most unlimited Prerogatives, because we are morally assured, she never would use them but to promote the Good and Welfare of her People. A Queen that is intirely in the Interests of her People, and cannot reasonably be so much as suspected to have any Interest of her own, distinct from theirs. A Queen, that has been remarkably careful about Matters of Piety, and expressed the most earnest Desire to transmit to Posterity the same excellent Religion that is established among us. A Queen, that is so far from endeavouring to enrich her self by the Spoil of her Subjects, that she has not only been, beyond Example, provident in the Management of the publick Treasure, but also as frugal in her own Expences, as with Decency, and with the Preservation of the Honour of the Crown she could be, with this only Design, that she might spare as much as was possible out of her own Revenue towards the publick Use, that so her Subjects might be the less burthened.

But it would be endless to say all that might be said upon this Subject, I am sure without Flattery, and I verily believe, without the Suspicion of it; and I am sensible I have already kept you too long.

I shall therefore only add this one Thing, *viz.* that being so extremely happy as we now are, both in the Constitution of the Government, and in the Administration of it; we have nothing else to do, but to be thankful to God for these Blessings, to endeavour to walk worthy of them, and to pray for their Continuance: And in Order to this last, to put up our hearty Supplications to the Throne of Grace, that God would be pleased to grant the Queen a long Life, and to direct her Counsels, and prosper her Endeavours for the publick Good; and that when he shall be pleased to translate her hence to a better Kingdom, which for our own Sakes we cannot but wish may not be in our Time, he will then

The Subject's Duty.

OF 35

bleſs our Poſterity with a Succeſſion of ſuch Princes, and, if it may be, from her own Body, who, like her, may govern wiſely, and live virtuously, and by the Authority both of their Laws and of their godly Example, may perfect that Reformation which, ſuch is our preſent Corruption, both as to Principles and Morals, it is to be feared her Reign alone, though we wiſh it may be a very long one, will not be ſufficient to accompliſh.

And may God of his infinite Mercy vouchſafe to hear and grant theſe our Petitions, for the ſake of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. To whom, &c.

JOHN IV. I.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits
whether they are of God: Because many falſe Pro-
phets are gone out into the World.

THE first of this kind that we meet with in Scripture, or Ecclesiastical History, was that Arch-Heretic Jansen, who was quickly followed by several others, his Disciples or Followers, some of whom we had taken Notice of by Dr. P. and the other Writers, in their Epistles, and the Number of them was so increased before Dr. Jansen's Death, who outlived all the other Apostles, that he says, in the latter Part of the Text, that there were then many false Prophets gone out into the World. Upon which Occasion

whereby Christians might be preserved from the danger of being misled by any false Prophet, who might pretend to be a Prophet of God, for with respect to the taking upon them the Name of Christ, and the saying, we are the Kingdom of God, and the Son of Man, which is obliged to be explained, that is in deed, to corrupt the Faith of Christ, as to take away all that Mystery from its Article of Belief, which they could not well comprehend; and all that Strength and Security from its Precept, which, as laying an obligation to comply with the Law of God, they found it hard to bring them- selves to comply with.

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DISCOURSE CIL

The Way of trying Prophets.

(*****)

I JOHN IV. 1.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God: Because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.



AFTER that the *Christian Religion* had been sufficiently taught and proved by the Preaching and Miracles of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, it pleased God, for wise Reasons, no Doubt, to permit great Opposition to be made to the Truth and Purity of it; not only by its former professed Enemies, the *Jews* and *Heathens*, but likewise by some among the *Christians* themselves; some, I mean, who overpowered in a Manner by that strong Evidence, whereby *Christianity* in general had been confirm'd, could not avoid Conviction, nor, with any Ease in their own Minds, decline the taking upon them the Name of *Christians*; and yet, not liking nor relishing well that Submission and Obedience of the Understanding, and that Strictness of Life which it obliged them to, set themselves so to explain, that is indeed, so to corrupt the Faith of *Christ*, as to take away all that Mystery from its Articles of Belief, which they could not well comprehend; and all that Strictness and Severity from its Precepts, which, as laying an ungrateful Restraint upon their Lusts and Passions, they found it hard to bring themselves to comply with.

The first of this Kind that we meet with in Scripture, or Ecclesiastical History, was that Arch-Heretick *Simon Magus*; but he was quickly followed by several others, his Disciples or Imitators; some of whom we find taken Notice of by *St. Paul*, and the other *Apostles*, in their *Epistles*; and the Number of them was so increased before *St. John's* Death, who out-lived all the other *Apostles*, that he says, in the latter Part of the Text, that there were then, *many false Prophets gone out into the World*. Upon which Observation,

servation, he very reasonably grounds the Caution and Advice which he gives, in the former Clause of it: *Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God.*

And if it was thus even in the *Apostles Days*, if even then, there were some, as St. Paul calls them, *false Apostles, deceitful Workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ*; it is no Wonder that it has been so in the Ages since, or that it is so now. Nay indeed, this is what we had great Reason to expect: or rather it is what we might be sure would be; because it had been expressly foretold long ago; by Prophets of unquestionable Authority. *There shall arise false Christs, and false Prophets*, says our Saviour, *and many shall come in my Name, and shall deceive many.* And, of your own selves also, says St. Paul, *shall Men arise, speaking perverse Things, to draw away Disciples after them.* And again, *There must be also Heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* And, as there were false Prophets among the Jews, says St. Peter, *so shall there be false Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.* And many shall follow their pernicious Ways.

And the Methods whereby these Seducers have endeavoured, and indeed with too great Success, to draw Men from the Truth of the Gospel, have been various; some have endeavoured it, by forging and setting forth *Gospels* and *Epistles* under the venerable Names of the *Apostles*. This was an early Artifice; but Thanks be to God, it was, by the Care and Vigilance of the first *Christians*, soon discovered, and is now impracticable. Others have done it by corrupting their genuine Writings; but this Fraud also has been seldom long undetected, and would in vain be now attempted any more. And others have endeavoured the same by setting up oral Tradition as a Rule of Faith, together with the Scripture, and as a necessary Supplement thereto; and boldly affirming that all the Doctrines by them taught, which are not to be found in Scripture, have been delivered down to them from *Christ* and his *Apostles* this Way. But this Method of Deceit has been likewise so fully laid open and confuted in the learned Writings of the *Protestants* against the Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, that it may reasonably be hoped, there is little or no Danger of our now being deceived thereby.

Nevertheless, there are two other Methods of Deceit, which we are still, and always shall be, in Danger of; the first is, of those who wrest and pervert the Sense of Scripture, by a false Interpretation of it; the other is, of those who pretend themselves to be afresh inspired by God, in such Manner as the *Apostles* were.

Against the former of which we may be in good Measure secured, by constant reading, and diligent Study of the holy Scripture; and treasuring up, and deeply impressing on our Minds, those great Truths of Religion, whether relating to Belief or Practice, which are there clearly taught; and resolving to admit of no Interpretation of any more obscure or doubtful Texts, even tho' we have not Skill or Learning enough to shew the Falsity of such Interpretation, whereby Countenance seems to be given to any Opinion that is not according to the Analogy of Faith, or to any Practice that is not agreeable to that Strictness and Purity of Life which the holy Gospel every where enjoins.

And how we may be secured against the other Method of Deceit, viz. that of those who falsely pretend to Inspiration, is what we are taught in the Text, and will be my Business to explain, and shew more at large in my following Discourse: *Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God, because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.* Many false Prophets, says he, are gone out, that is, many that false-

ly pretend to the Teaching of the Spirit. For they were such *false Prophets* as these, which the *Apostle* seems to have had chiefly in his Mind; and that I take to be the Reason why he calls them *Spirits*, as well as *Prophets*. *Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God.*

And this Caution and Advice can never be given unseasonably, because as there were *many such false Prophets* in the World, in the *Apostles* Time, so there have been ever since, and probably ever will be while the World shall last. Every Age has afforded Plenty of such *Enthusiasts*, whose Fraud, or Madness, or Folly, has in due Time been made manifest unto all Men. And yet the continual Discoveries of former Cheats of this Kind have not proved sufficient to discourage others from setting up the same Pretence to Inspiration, neither have they afforded to the People of following Times sufficient Caution to beware of the like Impostures.

For even now, after all the Experience that the World has already had in such Matters, there is a new Set of *Prophets* lately risen up among ourselves; and as the wildest *Enthusiasts* have had, so have these also their Followers.

Nevertheless I will not yet take upon me to say, that these are *false Prophets*; it is Time that must shew that; and a very little Time, it is likely, will shew it sufficiently. But, all that I affirm now is Matter of Fact, that they call themselves *Prophets*, that immediate divine Inspiration is what they pretend to; and that they say with great Confidence, that they are the *Messengers of the Lord of Hosts*, and that all the Discourses which they utter in their Extasies, are *the Oracles of God*, and *the Warnings of the eternal Spirit*.

Heb. i. 1.

And who can, now at first, be sure that they are not so? For why may not *God*, who at sundry Times, and in diverse Manners, spake in Times past to our Fathers by the *Prophets*, speak also in the like Sort to us their Children? We, indeed, can see no Reason, why, after the full Revelation of the *everlasting Gospel*, by our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, there should be any new Revelations given, especially to such as do already receive, and profess to give intire Credit to, the *Gospel-Revelation*. But *God's Thoughts* are not always as *our Thoughts*; and many Things may be requisite or necessary for some wise and great Purposes, which we, not knowing the Counsels and Designs of Providence, may not see any Reason for. And, as on the one Hand, if we should give Ear and Credit to these Persons, as to the *Messengers of God*, when indeed *the Lord has not sent them, nor spoken by them*, we may be led into such Mistakes as may prove fatal to us; so, on the other Hand, if we should slight and reject their Warning, when indeed *a Spirit or an Angel has spoken to them*, we may be found to have fought against *God*. Whether therefore they be true, or whether they be false *Prophets*, which do now, or which may at any Time hereafter thus take upon them to speak to us in the Name of *God*; it is very good and reasonable Advice which the *Apostle* here gives, in relation to them: *Believe not every Spirit; but try the Spirits whether they are of God.*

Isa. lv. 8.

I. *Believe not every Spirit.* And this first Part of the *Apostle's* Advice, I take to imply in it these four Things.

1. *That we should not readily give any Ear at all to such as pretend to Inspiration.* Go not after them, nor follow them, says our *Saviour*. Indeed, to a very strong Proof of any Man's Inspiration, if it be offered to us, if it be laid in our Way, we ought to yield; at least so far, as to be thereby put upon farther enquiring into the Matter; because we cannot be sure that *God* will not any more communicate his Will to Men, in such Manner as he has formerly done, by the immediate Inspiration of his *Holy Spirit*. But I say, that if no such Evidence of divine Inspiration be plainly laid before

Luke xvii. 23.

fore us, without our seeking, we shall not need to go out of our Way to seek for it; because we have no Reason at all to doubt, but that the Revelation of God's Will already made to us in the holy Scripture, is abundantly sufficient for all those Purposes, for which a divine Revelation might be expected, or could reasonably be desired. For this *Word of God*, we are told, is a *Lamp unto our Feet, and a Light unto our Path*. This we are assured, *is able to make us wise unto Salvation*; wiser than which we need not desire to be. This we are assured, *is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, and for Instruction in Righteousness*; that is, for every good Purpose. This we are assured, was given, *that the Man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*: And if it was given for this Purpose, there can be no Doubt but that it is sufficient for it: Or, without considering the Testimony that the holy Scripture gives of its own Sufficiency, we might otherwise be satisfied that it is sufficient; because the Wisdom of God has not, that we know of, thought fit, in all the Ages since the *Apostles* Times, to make any other publick Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And if the holy Scripture, as rationally interpreted, explained, and applied by the Pastors of the *Christian Church*, and the Preachers of the Gospel, has been sufficient to guide into the Way of Truth, and to bring to eternal Life, all that have been saved in all this Time, for sixteen hundred Years past; we may rest assured, that it is still as sufficient for the same Purposes. And therefore having now all those Books of holy Scripture in our Hands, which have always hitherto, since the *Apostles* Times, served for the Instruction of the *Christian Church*; and being also well furnished with spiritual Guides and Pastors, regularly ordained, and lawfully commissioned to explain and preach to us the Doctrine of the Gospel; with whom, in blessing their Ministry, our *Saviour* has promised, that he will *always be present, even unto the End of the World*. As we see no Need that there is of new Revelations, so we have no Reason to expect them. And therefore for us, who believe upon such good Grounds the Perfection of Scripture, as a Rule both of Faith and Manners, to *seek out* now for new Lights, would be just the same Folly, as it would be to search for a Candle to add Light to the Sun. But,

Psal. cxix. 105.

1 Tim. iii. 15.

—16.

—17.

Mat. xxviii. 20.

2. What I take to be farther implied in this first Branch of the *Apostles* Advice, *Believe not every Spirit*, is this; *that how confidently soever any Man may give out himself to be an inspired Prophet, we should not be forward to believe his Pretences*. And for this there is a very good Reason given in the Text it self, *viz. because many false Prophets are gone out into the World*. And if this was a good Reason then to make Men very shy and cautious of admitting any Man's Pretence to Inspiration, it is much more so now; for then, when the *Apostle* gave this Advice, as there were *many false Prophets*, so, we are sure, there were many true ones too. And as, when of the Money that is current abroad, there is some good, as well as some counterfeit, he that takes Money by Tale only, may probably take some good, as well as some bad, and by good Luck, may take none but what is good; whereas, when the Coin is generally corrupt, he must have almost the same good Luck, if he ever receives any good; so it is here: Then, when there were *true*, as well as *false Apostles*, a Man that used no Caution might yet, by very good Hap, only fall into the Hands of a *true Apostle*. Whereas, ever since the *Apostles* Days, a like uncautious Man must have had the same good Hap, not to fall into the Hands of a Seducer; because, ever since the *Apostles* left the World, tho' every Age has produced a great many that have given out themselves to be inspir'd, we are not sure there has been any one that has been really so; and, as to far the greatest Part of them we have undeniable Evidence, that if they were inspired at all, it was by an evil Spirit,

Spirit, and not by the holy Spirit of God. And therefore, having as yet no Inducement to think it is otherwise now, than it has been for sixteen hundred Years past, nothing can be more reasonable than the Caution which the *Apostle* here gives, *not to be forward* to give Credit to any that shall now set up with the like Pretences. It is as much Favour as any new Prophet can now in Reason desire, considering what Ground we have to suspect an Imposture, that we should not condemn him unheard; but to have any Inclination at all in his Favour; to imagine or suppose it likely that he may be a true Prophet, before he has given any plain Evidence of a divine Mission, is an Argument of such Weakness, Indiscretion, and Unwariness, as we should be ashamed of in any Matter of our worldly Concerns, wherein there was the like Uncertainty; or rather, wherein there was such great Probability of our being imposed upon. And therefore,

3. Another Thing meant, as I suppose, to be implied in this first Part of the *Apostle's* Advice, *Believe not every Spirit*, is; *that we should never accept any Person whatsoever as inspired, without his first giving good Proof of his divine Inspiration*. What Proof, in this Case, is sufficient, and may be reasonably required, I shall have Occasion to consider by and by. But very good and sufficient Proof, I say, is what we ought to insist upon and demand, before we give any Credit at all to any Man that pretends to Inspiration. Because, there being, as the *Apostle* here says, *many false Prophets in the World*, that is, many that falsely pretend to Inspiration; it is possible, at least, it is as likely as not, that the Man that comes to us with this Pretence is an Impostor: Or if he be not; yet, so long as he gives no Evidence of his Inspiration, we are guilty of no Fault in not receiving him as an inspired Prophet; for it can never be a Fault, not to believe without Reason; and that is no Reason to us which does not appear. Nay indeed, supposing him to be really inspired, yet, while he gives no Proof of his Inspiration, so far is our refusing to receive him as an inspired Prophet from being a Fault, that it is no more than we are bound in Duty to do; we should be to blame if we received him; we do well and wisely in rejecting him: For it would be just the same Rashness and Indiscretion in us (tho' perhaps it might not be attended with the like hurtful Consequences) to receive as an inspired Prophet, a Man that is really inspired, while as yet there is no Evidence appearing of his being so inspired, as it would be to give Credit to an Impostor. And besides, it may also probably be a Mistake of much worse Consequence, to receive as an inspired Prophet a Man that is not inspired, than it would be not to receive as such, a Man that is really inspired: For if we receive as an inspired Prophet a Man that is not inspired, we run a Hazard of being deceived by him to our eternal Ruin; whereas, if for Want of sufficient Evidence of Inspiration, we should not give Credit to a Man that is really inspired, the only Hazard we seem to run, is, of not knowing some Truths, which might be upon some Accounts useful to be known, but without the Knowledge of which we may do very well; because the holy Scripture alone, we are well assured, *is able to make us wise unto Salvation*.

4. Lastly: What must be still farther meant to be implied in this first Branch of the *Apostle's* Advice, *Believe not every Spirit*, is this; *that we should not ever take any Man's Word only for his being an inspired Prophet*. The Reason is, because if we admit, as of sufficient Force to prove Inspiration, a Man's own Affirmation that he is inspired, we must *believe every Spirit*, directly contrary to the *Apostle's* Warning. For it is not to be supposed that any Man that is desirous to be taken for an inspired Prophet, will ever be wanting in giving an ample Testimony to himself. Either therefore this Proof of divine Inspiration must be wholly set aside; or else, we must allow of it by whomsoever it is offered; and whoever gives out himself to be a Prophet,

Prophet must forthwith, without farther Examination, be received as such.

But upon these Terms, our blessed *Saviour* himself, who was certainly sent by God, did not require or expect that Credit should be given to him: Nay, he expressly acknowledges, that if he had not given other Proof of his divine Mission, his own Testimony, by it self, had not been credible. *If, says he, John v. 31. I bear witness of my self, my witness is not true.*

And yet the Matter which a Man witnesses concerning himself may be true, tho' *his witnessing* it be not alone a sufficient Proof of its Truth. *Tho' I bear Record of my self, says our Saviour in another Place, yet my Record is true, for I know whence I came.* Altho' therefore we are not to give intire Credit to any Man that confidently affirms his own Inspiration; for if we should do that, we must believe every Impostor; yet if the Man that gives out himself to be inspired, be otherwise a Man of Probity, Honesty, and Modesty; if he has always before been thought to have a clear Head and a sound Judgment, and was never known or suspected to be subject to Vapours and Whimsies; and if when he affirms his own Inspiration, he does it in a grave and becoming Manner, and with all the Appearance that is possible of Truth, and Sincerity, and Self-Persuasion: And lastly, if there be nothing in the Matter which he utters as by divine Inspiration, that is blasphemous, impious, wicked, unworthy of God, or apparently contrary to sound Doctrine; in these Cases, I say, the Man's own constant Affirmation that he is inspired, may very reasonably put us upon farther enquiring into the Matter, in order to the obtaining the fullest Satisfaction that we can about it.

And this leads me to discourse of the second Branch of the *Apostle's* Advice in the Text, very fitly subjoined to the former, *viz.*

II. *Try the Spirits whether they are of God.* For there being many false Prophets, or false Pretenders to Inspiration, in the World, it is not reasonable that we should, before, or without Trial, believe every Spirit. And yet, on the other Side, being well assured that there have been formerly several that have been divinely inspired, and that have spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and being not absolutely certain, that there never will be any more such Persons; neither is it reasonable that we should immediately damn, as a Cheat and Impostor, every Man that gives out this Pretence, while as yet no Signs or Tokens of Imposture do appear; but the right and the wise Way is to wait awhile, before we give Judgment; and before we either receive or reject, to try the Spirits whether they are of God.

But how, it may be asked, shall we try them? What Proof of any Man's being inspired, who pretends himself so, may reasonably be required, or expected?

I answer in general, such as other Prophets, formerly sent by God, have been enabled to give; such as *Moses*, the Law-giver of the Jews, and such as *Christ* and his *Apostles*, the first Preachers of the Gospel, did give. For every Man that pretends to teach as by Inspiration, takes upon him to be a special Ambassador sent from Heaven on some extraordinary Message: And no Man is ever received as an Ambassador till he shews his credential Letters.

More particularly, there are two Proofs of divine Inspiration; one, or the other, or both, of which we may with good Reason demand of any Man that sets up with this Pretence: Especially, in Case the Revelation he pretends to have had, be of publick Concern, and he requires in the Name of God that we should give him Credit: And they are *Prophecy*, and *Miracles*.

1. *Prophecy*, or the foretelling Things to come. This Way *Moses*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, made Proof of their divine Mission. They foretold

Isa. xli. 23.

some Things that were not to be till many Years after, as well as others which were then shortly to come to pass; and those too, Events not depending on the necessary working of natural Causes, but only on the Pleasure of God, or the Will of free Agents: Which Kind of Events, we have Reason to think, cannot be foreknown by any but God, nor be certainly foretold but by Revelation from God; according to that of the *Prophet*, *Shew the Things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.*

But then this Proof of divine Inspiration, tho' it be indeed as good as any that can be given, is a convincing Proof to those only who happen to live either at, or after, the Time when the Prophecy is fulfilled: It is no Proof at all, it is an Amusement only, to those who live but at the Time when the Prophecy is first given out; because it is a Course of Time, which that Generation of Men may never live to see, that must shew whether the Thing foretold does come to pass or no, and consequently, whether the Man that foretold it was a true or a false Prophet. There is therefore,

2. Another Proof of divine Inspiration, that may with good Reason be expected and required of any Man, at the very Time when he utters his pretended divine Revelations; and that is, *Miracles*. Thus *Moses* proved his divine Mission to those to whom he was sent. And thus our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* proved their divine Mission to those to whom they first preached the Gospel; they did *the Works of God*, that is, such Works as could not be done but by the Power of God.

John xv. 24.

—x. 37.

This therefore, I say, is what may now also be reasonably expected from those who do now a-Days pretend to Inspiration, and declare that they are sent by God on an extraordinary Message to us. Let them, as *Moses* did, *turn the Water into Blood*, and the *Dust into Lice*; and *divide the Channel of the Sea*, so that Men may pass through it, as on dry Land: Or let them, as our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* did, with only a Word speaking, *heal the Sick*, cure the *Cripples*, give *Sight* to the *Blind*, cast out *Devils*, and *raise the Dead*: Or let them, as the *Apostles* did, speak with Understanding in *Languages* which they never learned; and then we shall have some Reason, to listen to what they have to say to us: But till then we shall have none; till then we shall be blameless in not believing them, even though they be true Prophets; for even of himself our *Saviour* says, *If I had not done among them the Works that none other Man did, they had not had Sin.* And if the unbelieving *Jews* would not have been to blame in not believing *Christ*, unless he had proved his divine Mission by Miracles; by the same Reason neither shall we be now to blame, if we hearken not to these new Prophets (even supposing them to be true Prophets) unless they also give the like Proof of their divine Mission. And of himself, whom yet, most certainly, *the Father had sanctified and sent into the World*, he says again, *If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not.* And if he, *the Son of God*, was not to be believed upon other Terms than his working of Miracles, much less is any other Man. In not believing therefore these new Pretenders to Revelation, unless they shall also work Miracles to prove their Mission, it is plain we are safe; but if we should believe them, we know not what Hazard we may run of being deceived by them. And by the same Reason that we believe their confident Pretence to Revelation, upon their own Testimony only, without Miracles; we must believe the like Pretence of any other Persons that shall ever come to us with the like Confidence; that is, we must give up our selves to be deluded by every Impostor.

But perhaps it will be said, that however there might be Need of Miracles to prove the divine Mission of *Moses*, because it was a *new Law* which God gave to the *Jews* by him; and of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, because the Matter of their Revelation was likewise, in great Measure, *new*; and not only so, but did also in Part abolish the Law that had been before given by *Moses*; yet there is not the same Reason to require or expect Miracles from those, who though they pretend to Inspiration, yet do not profess to be Authors of a new Revelation, or Preachers of another Gospel; because a Revelation that has been once well confirmed by Miracles, shall not need to be so confirm'd again; at least, not to such as believe the History of those Miracles whereby it was formerly confirmed.

And this indeed is true: But then I say likewise, that as there is no Need of Miracles to prove the Truth of a Revelation which has been already well proved by Miracles, and which by credible History we are assured has been so confirmed; so neither is there any Need of fresh Inspiration for the teaching of a Doctrine which has been already fully taught by Persons divinely inspired, by Persons whose divine Inspiration is acknowledged; and who, though they be gone from us, do yet continue to preach to us by those Writings which they have left behind them; and will continue to do so, for so long as these their Writings shall continue in the World.

And this is now the Case with us. Our *Saviour*, who, we are sure, came from God, preaches to us now, as much as he did once to the *Jews*, tho' in another Manner, in those Sermons of his which are recorded by the holy *Evangelists*: And the *Apostles*, who were commissioned by our *Saviour* to preach his Gospel, do still preach it, and will ever be preaching it to us, as long as those Books and *Epistles*, which they left behind them, shall continue in the World, and be known to be theirs; and these holy Scriptures have been sufficient for the Instruction of all *Christians* hitherto, ever since the *Apostles* Days. What Need then is there of new Inspiration, if there be no new Matter to be taught? Or what needs any Man pretend to Inspiration, while, by his own Confession, he preaches no other Doctrine than is already taught in that holy Scripture, which all those whom he speaks to, do already acknowledge was *given by Inspiration of God*?

But supposing that the Thing is really so as they give out, *viz.* that they are indeed afresh inspired by God with the Knowledge of those same Truths which are contained in Scripture; yet still we are safe in not hearkening to them, as to Prophets and inspired Persons, and in not receiving what they utter, as Matter lately revealed to them; at least, not till they shall give good Evidence of their divine Mission; because we do already receive, upon the Testimony of the holy Scripture, all that which they pretend to teach us by new and fresh Inspiration. And if we do receive, as a divine Truth, and as divinely revealed, any Doctrine or Prophecy which is indeed such; what matters it whether we receive it from this Prophet or from that? From an old Prophet, or a new one? From a divine Revelation that was made seventeen hundred Years ago, or from one that was made but Yesterday?

In a Word therefore: The Doctrine, whatever it is, of those pretended Prophets, is either old or new; it is either the Doctrine of the Gospel, or it is another Gospel; let themselves say which it is. For if they shall say the first, *viz.* that their Doctrine is no other than the Doctrine of the Gospel: To what purpose then, we may well ask, do you pretend, or with what Truth can you pretend, that you are taught it now by immediate divine Inspiration; when, by your own Acknowledgment, you were taught it before, and we may all of us learn the same from the long ago divinely inspired Scripture?

Scripture? But if they shall say the other, *viz.* that the Matter which they are inspired with is new, and what we could not have learned from the Scripture; we may then (as was said before) very reasonably require of them to give such Proof of their Inspiration and Mission, by Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, as our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, and all that have hitherto been sent by God to publish a new Revelation to the World, have given; till when, we shall have no Reason to hearken to them at all; and if we do, it will be at our great Peril.

But if they shall say, (and that is indeed all that I think they can with any Appearance of Reason farther pretend,) that the Revelations now made to them are partly old, and partly new; inasmuch as, though what they now utter as divine Oracles, be not in Substance new, because it is no other than what is really and truly contained in Scripture; it is nevertheless what would not, what perhaps could not, have been discerned to be therein contained, without fresh Illumination; and that they are now enlightened with a clearer Knowledge of some Truths contained in Scripture than any others yet have been; that they are by special Inspiration of the Spirit, enabled to open the Book that has been always hitherto sealed up, and to give the true Sense of several dark and obscure Passages in Scripture, the Meaning whereof has not hitherto been apprehended, or which have been grossly misunderstood by all former Interpreters, and would perhaps never have been rightly understood but by Inspiration.

In this Case, if this be what they say, there is one Thing however that we may very reasonably require and demand of them, before we give them Credit, *viz.* that they should make out to us, by Reason, the Truth of that Interpretation of Scripture, which they say they have been taught by Revelation; and if they can and shall do this, we will readily receive their Interpretation, even tho' we should not believe them to be inspired.

And this is no unreasonable Demand; because a true Interpretation of a Text of Scripture, though it be supposed to be such an one as a Man could not have hit upon only by the working of his own Reason, yet when it is found out, may be capable of being made plain to others, by reasoning and Argumentation.

We have an Instance of this in the preaching of the *Apostles*; they, by the Illumination of the *Holy Spirit*, were directed to, and instructed in the Meaning of all those Passages in the *Old Testament*, whether Types, or Prophecies, which related to the *Messias*; which, without such Illumination they would not have understood: But then, after that they themselves were let into the Knowledge of them this Way, they were able by reasoning to make plain to others the Truth of their Interpretation of those Places, and to shew how exactly applicable they were to, and how punctually they were fulfilled in our *Saviour Christ*. This may be observ'd in almost all those Sermons of the *Apostles*, which are related in the History of their *Acts*, and likewise in all their *Epistles*.

And of St. *Paul* in particular it is observed, that entering into a Synagogue of the *Jews*, he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that *Christ* must needs have suffered, and risen again from the Dead; and that that *Jesus* whom he preached unto them, was *Christ*. And of the same *Apostle* it is noted in *Acts* ix. 22. that immediately after his own miraculous Conversion, before he had conferred with any of the *Apostles*, or heard any of their Sermons; when therefore the good Understanding which he himself had in Scripture, must have been chiefly, if not only, from divine Illumination; he confounded the *Jews* which dwelt at *Damascus*, proving that *Jesus* was the *Christ*. But now how could he
prove

prove this, so as to *confound* and silence the *Jews*, but only by out-reasoning them in the Interpretation that he gave of the Prophecies of the *Old Testament* which had foretold the *Messias*? And it may indeed be difficult to find out the true Key to some ancient Prophecy; but when that is once found out, whether by Study or divine Illumination, it may be easy enough afterwards, by the Help of that Key, to lay the whole Prophecy open, and to make the Interpretation of it clear, even to an ordinary Capacity. Let therefore, as I said, our *New Prophets* do thus, and then, without enquiring how they came by their Knowledge, we will readily admit their Interpretation of Scripture.

But if they cannot do this, if they cannot shew that the Interpretation which they give of Scripture is rational, and the Application which they make of it just and agreeable; we must then come upon them again with our former Demand, and require of them to demonstrate the Truth of their Interpretation, and the Justness of their Application of Scripture, and likewise their own Truth, in pretending to have received this Knowledge from the *Holy Spirit*, by their working Miracles. For to give such a Sense of Scripture as true, which cannot be made out to be true by a rational Interpretation, is all one, in Effect, as to give out a new Scripture; and we cannot, with good Reason, receive any Discourse or Writing as Scripture, even though it be not contradictory to any former Revelation, upon less Evidence than that upon which we acknowledge the divine Inspiration of that holy Scripture which we have already received.

And this Proof of Inspiration by Miracles, is indeed what may now with more Reason be demanded of our *New Prophets*, than it could have been of our *Saviour Christ*, or of the holy *Apostles*.

For the Coming of *Christ*, as a Prophet and a Lawgiver, had been long before foretold by former Prophets, particularly by *Moses*: *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your Brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all Things whatsoever he shall say unto you.* So that though our *Saviour* had wrought no Miracles, yet his Pretence to a divine Mission had been very credible; because from former Prophecies, the *Jews* had good Reason, just at that Time, to expect such a Prophet as our *Saviour* gave out himself to be. And he himself argued sometimes with the *Jews* upon this Foot, *Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me.* Deut. xviii. 15. John v. 39.

And so likewise our *Saviour*, after that his own divine Mission had been well proved and confirmed, promised and foretold, that his *Apostles*, whom he would commission to preach his *Gospel* after his Ascension, should be *guided by the Holy Spirit into all Truth*; so that if they in their own Persons had wrought no Miracles in Proof of their Inspiration, their Pretence to Inspiration had nevertheless been well and fully enough grounded upon and prov'd by our Lord's Promise and Prediction. John xvi. 13.

But what Promise in Scripture, what Prediction of *Christ* or his *Apostles*, or of any *ancient Prophets*, can our *new Prophets* produce, foretelling *their* Coming, and assuring us of *their* Inspiration? We have many Predictions in Scripture, that *false Christs and false Prophets* should arise, and *deceive many*; but we have none, that I know of, foretelling that any should speak or write by immediate Inspiration of the Spirit, after that the holy *Apostles* should have left the World; having first committed to Writing all such Things as the Spirit of God had dictated to them, and commanded them to write. We have no Prophecy of Scripture, that I know of, foretelling, that in After-ages God would raise up other Prophets like unto them, to whom he would communicate his Will in such Manner as

he had done to them, by immediate Inspiration of the *Holy Spirit*. So that the Pretence of our *new Prophets* to such Inspiration, being not founded on Scripture, must fall to the Ground, unless it be supported by Miracles, there being plainly no other Foundation to rest it sufficiently upon.

Well! But you will say then, what if these Men should now give such Proof of their Inspiration as we may reasonably require? What if their Predictions should come to pass? Or what if they should do Miracles?

I answer; When this shall be, it will be soon enough to resolve that Question; but till then we shall not need to trouble our selves about it. And yet to say somewhat briefly to it now may not be amiss; because it may well be supposed, that a Man that already counterfeits Revelations, will not be long before he will set upon counterfeiting Prophecies or Miracles: I mean whenever he shall have a convenient Opportunity, and shall find his Followers and Admirers in a good Disposition to be deluded; and the *Devil*, we may be sure, whose Interest is highly served by such Delusions, will not be wanting to lend his utmost Assistance towards carrying on the Cheat.

1. Then, let it be supposed, that they foretell Things to come; that is, that some Things which they foretell do come to pass; I mean presently, or within a short Time; for if the Accomplishment of their Predictions be not till a long while hence, it may serve for an Argument to our Posterity of such Men's Inspiration, but it can be none to us. In this Case, I say, one Thing to be considered by us, is the Nature of the Event that was foretold; because if it was a Thing that was produced by the working of natural Causes, the foretelling it was not a certain Proof of divine Inspiration; for the *Devil* is without doubt a better natural Philosopher than any Man, and so may foresee, and may inspire his Emissaries to foretell several Events of this Kind, which no mortal Man, by his own Wit and Skill only, could have foretold. And the only Things, which, as I suppose, none but God can foreknow, are such Events as depend upon the working of the Will of some free Agent.

And again, even of these Events, commonly called future Contingencies, several, it may well be supposed, are already foretold in some dark Prophecies of the holy Scripture, which though not understood by us, may yet be understood by the *Devil*; who, if not naturally of greater Wit, must yet needs, by his longer Observation, Experience and Study, have attained to much greater Skill in such Matters than any short-liv'd Man can do. So that a true Interpretation of some Scripture-Prophecies, which have not hitherto been understood by Man, may possibly be had from the *Devil*, and consequently, is not a sure Proof of divine Illumination.

Again; If the Events that have been foretold by any pretended Prophet, are such, the Foreknowledge whereof, even by the *Devil* himself, cannot be accounted for either of these Ways, some Consideration is then to be had of their Number. For when God endues any Man with the Spirit of Prophecy, in order to his gaining Belief to some Messages of publick Concern which God has charged him with, it cannot be supposed but that he will enable him to give full and sufficient Proof of his divine Mission; and a full and sufficient Proof thereof, in Case no other Proof of any other Kind but only by Prophecy, be given of it, can hardly be given, but by a Man's truly foretelling a great many future Events.

And yet, lastly, if a Man should truly foretell a great many future Events, even this would not be a good Proof of divine Inspiration, in Case any one, though but one only, of his Predictions should fail to be accomplished in its Time. For a wise and cunning Being, such as the *Devil*, that old
Serpent,

Serpent, certainly is, may by a probable Conjecture only, foretell several future Contingencies, and may rarely be out in his Guess; so that a Man may be only an Emissary or Instrument of the *Devil*, who does truly foretell some such Things; and it is certain he is no other, in case there be a Failure in any one of those Predictions which he gives forth as by divine Inspiration; because the Spirit of God, which searcheth all Things, and *understands* even the *Thoughts* of Men *long before*, cannot be deceived in any Thing. And this Rule is plainly given in the Scripture it self. *And if thou say in thy Heart, How shall we know the Word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord, if the Thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the Thing which the Lord hath not spoken; but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.* But, Deut. xviii. 21, 22.

2. Let it be farther supposed, that a Man now pretending to Inspiration seems also to do Miracles; it is to be remembred, that it is foretold, that the *Coming of the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders.* So that though true Miracles are undoubtedly a good, perhaps the best, and for the present the most convincing Evidence of divine Inspiration, yet there is in this Case great Room for Deceit, and consequently great Need of Caution. Two Things especially, there are, in this Case, needful to be carefully enquired into. 2 Thess. ii. 9.

First, the Truth of the Fact. We should be well assured that the wonderful Thing said to be done, was really done; and for this Purpose it may be required, that it should be done either in our own Sight and Presence, or in the Sight and Presence of *many* other credible Persons; *several* of whom should, without any Contradiction from any other Persons that were then present, testify the same, as a Matter of their own certain Knowledge.

And when we shall have received this Satisfaction as to the Fact, it will be then farther needful to be strictly enquired into, whether it was a true Miracle, that is, whether it was an Operation plainly exceeding the known Power of natural Causes, and of evil Spirits; as it is evident most of the Miracles of *Moses*, and our blessed Saviour were. Exceeding, I say, the known Power of *evil Spirits*, as well as of *natural Causes*; and how great *their* Power is, we can hardly certainly know; only we may very reasonably think, that *the Prince of the Power of the Air*, as the *Devil* is called in Scripture, is able to do far greater Things than any that as yet have been so much as reported to have been done by our *new Prophets*. Eph. ii. 2.

Well, but you will say, supposing that thus far also we should receive all the Satisfaction that we can reasonably desire; that is, that the wondrous Work which we are fully persuaded was done by some pretended Prophet, after the best Trial and Examination that we can make of it, does appear to be miraculous; may we then reasonably give Ear to what the Man has to say to us?

Yes truly, I think we may; nay indeed, I think we shall be to blame if we do not. But yet, I do not say, that immediately upon this we ought to receive, as a divine Oracle, every Thing that this Man shall utter. If, says *Moses*, *there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: Thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your Heart, and with all your Soul.* And our Saviour himself tells us, *That there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall shew great Signs* Deut. xiii. 2, 3. Mat. xxiv. 24.

Signs and Wonders, insomuch, that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.

But what is then to be done? If false Prophets may give the same Tokens, to Appearance, of a divine Mission, that true Prophets have done; how shall we do to know certainly which are true, and which are false?

I answer, even in this Case, which yet we may well think does very rarely happen, there is one other Method of *trying the Spirits, whether they are of God*, which we may be certain will not fail nor deceive us; and that is, by their Doctrines: What therefore we should have to do, if ever we should meet with such an appearing Evidence of any Man's Inspiration, as we could not after the strictest Search discern any Fraud in, would be to examine well the Nature of those Doctrines which he teaches as by God's Command and Authority, and to observe whether they be *according to Godliness*, whether they be worthy of God. And if they are not so, we ought not either to receive the Doctrines, or to accept the Man as a Prophet, no not even upon the strongest Evidence that can be given of Inspiration; because it is a contradiction to the Truth and Holiness of God, that he should ever commission any Man to teach any Doctrine, contrary to Truth or Holiness. For *he abideth faithful*, as the ^{2 Tim. ii. 13.} *Apostle says, he cannot deny himself*; and it would be to deny himself, to commission any Man either to withdraw his Creatures from their due Obedience to him, or to invalidate the Credit of former divine Revelations, or to teach any Doctrine derogating from his eternal and essential Attributes, his Justice, Holiness, Goodness, or Truth; or to set up other Gods, or to entice Men to Idolatry, or to prescribe, or so much as to give License, or any Encouragement to Impiety, Prophaneness, Falshood, Lying, Perjury, Deceit, Injustice, Uncleaness, Intemperance, or any moral Wickedness. And therefore, our Saviour, in *Matth. vii. 16.* immediately after he had given a Caution to *beware of false Prophets*, adds these Words, *Ye shall know them by their Fruits*, that is, by the Fruits of their Doctrines; by the Nature and Tendency of them: So that whatever Appearance a Man may ^{2 Cor. xi. 13, 14.} make of Honesty, *For Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light; therefore it is no great Thing if his Ministers also be transformed as the Ministers of Righteousness*; or what Proof soever he may give of his Truth, or what Evidence soever of divine Inspiration; we may be most certain that he is not a Messenger from God, if the Matter of his Doctrine be contrary either to the Principles of natural Religion, or to the eternal Laws of Reason, or to the Truth of a former divine Revelation. ^{Gal. i. 8, 9.} *If we, says St. Paul, or any Man, or even an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, and which ye have received; let him be accursed.*

Thus we are to *try the Spirits whether they are of God*; which, if we do sincerely, and with true Love to God and Truth, the blessed Consequence will be, that, how much soever false Prophets do abound, and ^{2 Tim. iii. 13.} *however evil Men and Seducers may wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*, we shall be aware of their Devices; and being not ^{Eph. iv. 14.} *like Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Man, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they* ^{Heb. x. 23.} *lie in wait to deceive, shall hold fast the Profession of our Faith without* ^{2 Tim. iii. 14.} *wavering; and continue in the Things we have been taught, knowing of* ^{1 Cor. xv. 51.} *whom we have learned them; and be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our Labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Which God grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

DISCOURSE III.

Of Children's bearing the Iniquities of their Fathers.

LAMENT. V. 7.

Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquities.



HE Title of this Book, called *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, declares its Author; and the Subject or Matter of it sufficiently shews upon what Occasion it was written; viz. either the Death of *Josiah*, or the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, or both.

For that it was written upon Occasion of *Josiah's* Death, is probably argued from what we read in *2 Chron. xxxv. 25*. And *Jeremiah* lamented for *Josiah*; and all the singing Men and singing Women spake of *Josiah* in their Lamentations to this Day, and made them an Ordinance in Israel; and behold they are written in the Lamentations.

But that it was written upon Occasion of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Captivity in *Babylon*, is, I think, still more probably argued, from that Preface or Introduction to this Book, which, though not in the *Hebrew*, we meet with in the *Greek Translation* thereof by the *Seventy*, in these Words; "And it came to pass, that after *Israel* was carried captive, and *Jerusalem* destroyed, *Jeremiah* sat down weeping, and lamented, or uttered forth, this Lamentation upon *Jerusalem*, and said, *How doth the City sit sorrowful*, &c.

But it may be, and indeed I think it the most probable Opinion of all, that the Book, as it now is, was written upon both these Occasions; I mean, that upon the Death of good King *Josiah*, which hapned some Years before the Captivity, *Jeremiah* did lament for him, in some such Words as we now meet with in this Book: But that afterwards, upon the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the carrying of the People captive into *Babylon*, he reviewed his former mournful Song, and added thereto, and intermingled therewith, some other Passages that were more peculiarly expressive of those sad Calamities.

The Book it self consists of two principal Parts; the first, contained in the four first Chapters, is chiefly a sorrowful Description of the miserable Condition of the *Jews*, by the Loss of such an excellent King, by the Ruin and Destruction of their City and Kingdom, and by their own Slavery in *Babylon*. The other Part, comprehended in this fifth Chapter, is a Prayer to God for Deliverance from that sore Affliction which they were then under; wherein, to move God to Compassion, their sad and miserable State, is again set forth, and humbly represented to him.

The Words I am now to discourse of are a Part of this Prayer. And, as such, they may be taken and understood three Ways.

1. As a simple Affirmation of a Matter of Fact; *Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquity.*

2. As a Complaint, or an Expostulation with God about it; as if it had been said, "Why is this? or what Justice or Reason is there in it, that we should be punished for our Father's Sins? Or,

3. Lastly, As a Petition to God, that it might be so no longer, but that this Entail of Punishment might be now cut off.

And accordingly, in my Discourse on the Words, I shall do these three Things:

I. I shall prove the Matter of Fact, *viz.* that God does sometimes make the Children bear the Sins of the Fathers.

II. I shall shew, that this Method of God's dealing with sinful Men is not to be complained of as unjust. And,

III. Lastly, I shall shew, that it is nevertheless a proper Matter of Petition or Prayer to God, that he would be pleased to cut off this Entail of Punishment, and *not remember against us the Iniquities of our Fathers.*

And in the handling of each of these Heads, I shall have a particular Respect to that which is the Occasion of this Day's Humiliation and Fasting.

I. I shall prove the Matter of Fact, *viz.* that God does sometimes make the Children bear the Sins of the Fathers. *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquities.*

And for the Proof of this we should need to look no farther, than to that very Case which the Text refers to, *viz.* the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Captivity of the *Jews* in *Babylon*; which came not to pass till about ^{2 Kings xxiii. 26, 27.} threescore Years, or more, after that wicked Part of *Manasseh's* Reign, whereby God had been provoked, and upon which he had determined to inflict this heavy Judgment upon them.

But this is not the only Instance of this Kind that the Scripture furnishes ^{2 Kings x. 11.} us with. For, for the Idolatry of *Ahab*, his whole Family was cut off; for ^{2 Sam. xxi. 1.} the Sin of *Saul* in killing the *Gibeonites*, the Kingdom after his Death was plagued with three Years Famine, Year after Year, in the Reign of *David*; ^{Ver. 9, 14.} and the same Sin was again most severely punished in *Saul's* own Family, when it could not be expiated, nor the Plague that was thereby occasioned be removed, but by the hanging up of seven of his Issue. And it was for ^{1 Sam. ii. 33.} the Sin of *Eli*, and his Sons, that his whole Posterity was deprived of the Priesthood, and that all the Increase of his House died in the Flower of their Age.

And what need I add more? for we may see with our own Eyes a standing Example of this in the whole Nation of the *Jews*, a People once beloved by God, and highly favoured above all other Nations; but they, when ^{Mat. xxvii. 25.} they crucified the Lord of Life and Glory, said, *His Blood be on us, and on our Children:* And so it has been ever since: For from that Time to this, they

they have never been in such a flourishing Condition as before. It was not many Years after, that their City, and Temple, and Commonwealth were entirely destroyed, and their whole Nation dispersed; ever since which they have wandered about the World as Vagabonds, every where hated and despised, and in some Places and Ages most miserably butchered and slaughtered; so that if one should add together the prodigious Numbers of them that have been massacred in several Ages and Countries, chiefly in, and soon after, the Siege and Destruction of *Jerusalem*, one would think it hardly possible that any of them should be remaining; and yet still they do remain, and in great Numbers too, some of them in almost every Country in the World, and every where unmixed with other People, to be, as it were, living Monuments of God's heavy Displeasure.

Or, we may, if we will, see still a greater Example of this Entail of Punishment in our selves; I mean in the whole Race of Mankind; upon all whom there is, as we see and feel by our own sad Experience, entailed a Curse, and a Disease, for the Transgression of our first Parents; for it is to that we all now owe our present Misery and Mortality: *By one Man Sin* Rom. v. 12. *entred into the World, and Death by Sin; and so Death passed upon all Men.*

And lastly, if we reflect upon that which is the Occasion of our now humbling our selves before God, viz. the barbarous Murder of King CHARLES the First, of blessed Memory, by his own Subjects, the People of this Land, and the Rebellion which preceded it, I believe we may think that we also have some Reason to say, with the *Jews* in the Text, *Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquities*: For well may those Evils and Calamities be thought to be sent upon the Nation for that Sin, which have been in natural Consequence the Fruits of it.

And such were, plainly, those many Years of Misery, of Anarchy or Tyranny, and of great Confusion, which immediately followed; and which continued until the happy Restoration of King CHARLES the Second; during which Time we might have taken up and applied to our selves a considerable Part of this Book of *the Lamentations*; we might have said, as the Prophet here does, *How hath the Lord afflicted Zion for the Multitude* Lam. i. 5, 6. *of her Transgressions? From the Daughter of Zion all her Beauty is departed; her Princes are become like Harts that find no Pasture; they are gone without Strength before the Pursuer. How hath the Lord covered* i. 1, 9, 10, 15, 16, 20, 21. *the Daughter of Zion with a Cloud in his Anger, and cast down from Heaven to the Earth the Beauty of Israel, and remembered not his Footstool in the Day of his Anger? Her King and her Princes were among the Gentiles; the Law was no more; the Prophets also found no Vision from the Lord. The Elders sat upon the Ground, and kept Silence, they cast Dust upon their Heads, and covered themselves with Sackcloth. All they that went by clapped their Hands at her; they hissed, and wagged their Head, saying, Is this the City that Men called the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole Earth? All her Enemies also opened their Mouth against her, and said, We have swallowed her up; certainly, this is the Day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it. The Priests and the Prophets were slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord; the young and the old lay on the Ground in the Streets; the Virgins and the young Men fell by the Sword. They that were brought up in Scarlet did embrace Dunghils. The Adversary and the Enemy entred into the Gates of Jerusalem; they shed the Blood of the Just in the midst of her. Also the Breath of our Nostrils, the Anointed of the Lord, was taken in their Pits; of whom we said, Under his Shadow we shall be safe. Then was our Inheritance turned to Strangers, and our* Chap. iv. 5, 12; 13, 20. *Houses to Aliens; we drank our Water for Money, and our Wood was sold* Chap. v. 2, 4. *unto*

Lam. v. 5, 8. *unto us. Our Necks were under Persecution; we laboured and had no Rest. Servants also did rule over us; and there was none to deliver us out of their Hand.*

But from their Hand, God be thanked, we have now for many Years been delivered: By the wonderful and most providential Restoration of King CHARLES the Second to his just Rights, we also were restored to our antient Government, both in Church and State, and to the publick and free Profession of the true Religion, together with our former Peace and Prosperity.

And yet, for all this, I doubt I may truly say, that we do even still in some Measure bear that Iniquity of our Fathers which we this Day desire to be humbled for.

For if we look back to the Times past, it will be easy to discern, that even the War which we are at this Time engaged in, had its first Ground in the Wickedness of this Day. For when the Father was cut off, and his Throne and Power usurped, the young Princes were forced to wander where they could find a Place: And there, in the Court of a neighbouring King, they might easily learn; there one of them, we are too sure, did learn, Customs and Manners, both in Government and Religion, clearly different from those which had been here received and established. And such Diligence, we well remember, was used, and such Progress made, during a short Reign of less than four Years, in endeavouring to bring in the same Customs and Manners among us, that if that Reign had continued much longer, we must, unavoidably, to all Appearance, have been brought under very great Bondage, both Spiritual and Temporal. But it pleased God, of his Goodness, to cut short those Days, so that our Enemies had not Time enough to accomplish their wicked Designs; it pleased him, I say, by a wonderful Deliverance, such as could not have been looked for, to preserve to us then our Rights, Properties and Religion: Upon which we might have said, in the Words of the Psalmist, *Our Soul is escaped as a Bird out of the Snare of the Fowler; the Snare is broken, and we are delivered.* But however, though God was graciously pleased not then to punish us so much as he seemed to threaten he would do, and as we were afraid he would have done; he was not so far reconciled to us as to forgive our Sin wholly, and suffer us to go altogether unpunished; but when he removed one Judgment, sent another in its Room. So that though it may, I hope truly, be said, that we are now made whole of that Disease, of which before we were sick almost to Death; it must nevertheless be granted, that even the Remedy by which we were cured, and by the Use whereof we are still preserved in Health, though not so bad as the Disease, yet has been, and still is, very painful and afflicting. For there was no Way to keep out Popery and Slavery, then pressing hard upon us, but by engaging in War with a potent Enemy, whose Strength now, after so many Years Experience as we have had of it, we have learned, I suppose, not to despise.

Forasmuch therefore as this tedious and expensive War, which we have been now, for many Years, engaged in, and of which God knows when we shall see an End, was, when it was first undertaken, and still is, the necessary Remedy of those much worse Evils that we were before in Fear, and indeed in very great Danger of; and forasmuch as the great Danger we were in of those Evils, was directly and naturally occasioned by the young Princes being sent abroad to wander in foreign Countries, by those who had first rebelled against and murdered the Father, and then seized upon his and their Inheritance; I think I may truly say, that though *our Fathers who sinned are not*; yet *we*, in this heavy Judgment of God still lying upon us, do to this Day *bear their Iniquities*; and how much longer we shall do so, under this, or some other Judgment, God only knows.

But,

But, I observed before, that these Words might be understood, not only as affirming a Matter of Fact, that thus it is, but also as implying a Complaint, or an Expostulation with God about it, *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquities.* As if it had been said, "Why is this? or what Justice or Reason is there in it, that *we* should *bear the Iniquities of our Fathers* that *sinned*? Why is it, that when they are dead and gone out of the World, who did the Sin; we, who being not then born, could not; we, who if we had been then living, would not have consented to, nor been Partakers in their Wickedness, should be punished for it?" And therefore I propounded, in the second Place, and to that I now proceed,

II. To shew, that this Method of God's dealing with sinful Men, is not to be complained of as unjust. And this I hope will sufficiently appear, if these following Things be considered.

1. That the temporal Evils, by which the Sins of the Fathers are punished in their Children, are, many Times, no other than the natural and necessary Effects of those Sins which the Fathers were guilty of.

This I have shewn to be in great Measure true, as to those Evils which we of this Nation have felt, and do still feel, in Punishment, as we may well think, of the Sin that was committed as on this Day by our Fathers, in the barbarous Murder of the Lord's Anointed.

And the same is plainly true in many other Instances.

For thus the Prodigal wastes away, in Rioting, Excess, or Gaming, that Portion of worldly Goods which was left him by his careful Ancestors, or neglects those Opportunities of improving his Stock, which the good Providence of God afforded him; and by this means comes to Beggary, he and his Children after him: But how can it otherwise be, unless God should every Day work Miracles, and multiply Men's Treasure, as once he did the poor Widow's Oil, on purpose to maintain them in their Luxury, Extravagance, or Sloth?

And so likewise the intemperate and unclean Person fills his Body with foul Humours, and contracts loathsome Diseases; and these of Course descend to those that derive their Bodies from his: and it must needs be so, unless God should interpose with his Almighty Power, to put a Stop to the natural Effects of our Folly and Madness. This indeed he might do, if he pleased; but that he should do so, can with no Reason be expected. And when it thus happens, and the Father lives to see it, this must needs be a sore Affliction and Punishment to him; but to the Children it is only a Misfortune, and on God's Part it is only a Permission; who cannot therefore be charged with Injustice for suffering Things to take their natural Course.

It may be considered, that the temporal Evils and Calamities wherewith God punishes the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, are, for the most part, only Privations of those Mercies which he had freely bestowed upon them once; or Denials of such Favours as he might, if he had pleased, have conferred upon them, but was under no Obligation, in Justice, to grant, altho' they had been descended from the most virtuous Parents. Or, in other Words, the Children of wicked Parents are not so happy and prosperous as God could have made them, if he would: Their Punishment is commonly no more than this, that God does not shew them such Favour, as he does, it may be, shew to some others, but is not obliged to shew to any. And what Injustice is there in this? *May not he do what he will with his own?* May not he *have Mercy on whom he will have Mercy*, and shew Favour to whom he pleases?

Thus it was in the Case of *Rehoboam*, from whom God was pleased to suffer ten Tribes to revolt, for the Sin and Idolatry of his Father *Solomon*:

But he needed not to have left him one Tribe; to reign over one Tribe was more than he, or his Father either, could have challenged of God as a Due; God did him no Wrong therefore in giving him no more than one Tribe: And we cannot say that he did, without denying to God, the sovereign Lord and Proprietor of all Things, that Power and Liberty which we our selves claim of bestowing our free and unmerited Favours on whom we will. For what Man is there, who, having a Place or Gift to bestow, will not chuse to bestow it rather on one whose Father was his Friend, than on one whose Father was his Enemy? and who can think him to blame for so doing? If we therefore, who are only Stewards of those Things which we possess, and pretend to give away, may do thus, certainly God, the true Owner and Proprietor of all Things, may do the same, without the least Imputation of Injustice.

And such have been the Calamities which have befallen this Nation, since the Perpetration of that horrid Wickedness which we this Day lament; those Evils I mean more especially, which have in natural Consequence been produced or occasioned thereby; very grievous Calamities indeed they have been in themselves, but yet they have been rather Denials or Privations of Good, than positive Inflictions of Evil. For though we suffered for several Years after the Commission of this great Wickedness, the manifold Inconveniences both of Anarchy and Tyranny; and have never since been so well settled, either in Government or Religion, as we were before; yet after all that is come upon us, the most that can be said, is, that we have not been so happy a Nation as we might have been, and probably should have been, had not the Guilt of that royal and innocent Blood that was as this Day shed, lain upon us; but still, God be thanked, we have been more happy than most of our Neighbour-Nations; we have, in the main, enjoyed a much greater Measure of Liberty and Peace, of Plenty and Prosperity, than most of them have done. So that though we have been always, like the *Israelites* of old, murmuring and complaining; and, like *Solomon's Fool*, crying out of the Badness of the Times, and enquiring, *why the former Days were better than these?* yet I believe if they who have been the most full of Complaints, had, when they were first born into the World, been endued with a Foresight of all that has since happened in the World, and it had then been put to their Choice to have lived in what Part of the World they had pleased, it would have puzzled them to have found out any Country in the whole Earth, wherein they could rather have chosen to have lived; or wherein if they had lived, they would have suffered fewer Difficulties, or lesser Inconveniences, or have enjoyed a greater Measure of Ease, Safety, Plenty, and Prosperity, than they have done here. So that though it may be true, and I think it probable that it is so, that we have in our Age born, in some Measure, the Iniquities of our Fathers, yet upon the whole, we have no Reason to be discontented with our Lot, or to complain as if we were hardly dealt with. But,

3. In Order to the farther clearing this Method of the divine Providence from the least Imputation of Injustice, it may be considered, that God has a sovereign and uncontrollable Dominion over all our Persons, as well as over our Possessions; that we our selves are his Goods, as well as any of those Things are, which we, by his Bounty, do enjoy; for it was he that made us, as well as all other Things; and he might not have created us at all, or he might have made us Birds, or Beasts, or Fishes; Monsters, or Naturals; and if he had done so, we could not have complained: For, as the *Apostle* argues, *Rom. ix. 12. Shall the Thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the Potter Power over the Clay, of the same Lump to make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour?*

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He therefore being our sovereign Lord, to whom we are indebted for all we have, and to whose mere Grace and Goodness it is entirely owing, that we our selves have any Being at all; he may, in Right of that absolute Dominion which he has over us as our Creator, without any Injustice, put us into whatever Condition he pleases, or alter it for the worse whenever he will, without assigning any other Cause or Reason of his doing so, but his own Pleasure only. Nay, he may, if he will, wholly take away that Life and Being, which he freely gave us, whenever he lists; when we are but a Month, or but a Day old, as well as when we have lived here threescore or fourscore Years; and in all this he does us no Wrong; because it was a free and unmerited Favour, that we ever lived at all, and nothing can oblige him to continue to us an undeserved Favour, unless he pleases, or for a longer Time than he sees good.

In short; whatever Condition God is pleased to put any of his Creatures into, if it be but better than Non-existence, or not being at all, *that* he may put any of his Creatures into, though they be perfectly innocent, without doing them any Wrong: And therefore it can be no Injustice in God, to take Occasion from the Sins of our Fathers, or Progenitors, to deal so by us as he might have done, though neither they nor we had sinned. For he may certainly, without Injustice, do that upon any Occasion, which he might have justly done upon no Occasion at all.

4. It may be also considered farther, that very many, if not most, of the Evils and Calamities by which God punishes the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, are such as are very great Punishments to the Parents, but are often very small Evils, nay, sometimes are very great Blessings and Favours, to the Children which suffer them.

For thus, the untimely Death of a hopeful Child is indeed a very sore Affliction to the Parent, especially when he reflects upon it as a Punishment sent by God upon him for his Sin: But it is a Blessing to the Child himself, who dies in the Lord, and is conveyed into Paradise, out of a troublesome World, before he so much as knew the Trouble of it.

And thus likewise, to a Man that has toiled and drudged all his Days, endeavouring by Fraud, Oppression and Extortion, to heap together a great deal of Wealth, and to raise a Family, it must needs be a great Grief and Disappointment, to see his Wealth, all his ill-gotten Goods, mouldring, wasting, or, as the wise Man expresses it, *fleeing away*; so that his Children, whom he has brought up in all Delicacy and Softness, are in Danger of being reduced to Beggary, or must be forced to get their Living by hard Labour; but to the Children themselves, for whose Sake it is that he is so much concerned, this Dispensation of Providence may be the greatest Blessing that could befall them; and so it will be, if the Consideration thereof impresses upon their Minds a serious Sense of Religion, and helps to mortify them to this World, and puts them upon taking good Courses, and makes them to beware of splitting themselves upon the same Rock.

And so likewise, if it be supposed, as I do indeed suppose, that we *have* born, and do still bear, *the Iniquities of our Fathers, who sinned, and are not*; particularly that great Iniquity which was acted as upon this Day, the barbarous Murder of an excellent Prince, together with the other Wickednesses that were preparatory thereto; there may be, however, a great deal of Goodness, as well as of Justice, in this Dispensation of Providence. For to them who had a Hand in this Sin, if they had any Affection at all to their native Country, or any Care and Concern about Posterity, it could not but be an Affliction to see what Desolation they had by this Sin, and the Preparations to it, brought upon their Country; to behold what Disorder and Confusion they had put every Thing into, and to contemplate the Miseries which

were

were thereby entailed upon their Posterity: But now to us their Children, even those Evils that we have suffered, or do yet suffer, upon that Account, may in Consequence be a Blessing. And so they will be, if we thereby shall be warned to avoid those Sins, which have drawn down such Miseries upon us; so they will be, if we thereby shall be taught to bear steady Loyalty to our Sovereign, to yield due Obedience to the Laws, to conform regularly to that excellent Worship which, by God's Providence, has been since restored, and is now established among us; to be humble, contented, and orderly, in our several Stations; to *study to be quiet, and to do our own Business*, and to *seek and endeavour after the Things that make for Peace*. If we, I say, shall be so happy as, by all the Evils that have befallen us, to learn these Virtues and Graces, we shall have no Reason to complain of our having suffered those Evils, from which we shall have reaped such great Advantage. For, much better will it be for us, to have born the Punishment of our Fathers Iniquity, without the Guilt of it, than it would be to incur the like Guilt our selves, as perhaps without such Warning we should have done, altho' we might escape the temporal Punishment thereof. Any Evil is to be reckoned as good, when it prevents or cures a greater Evil; and there is no Evil of Affliction so great as the least Evil of Sin.

In this therefore, and such like Cases, when by the *Judgments* of God, whether for their own or others Sins, Men are taught *Righteousness*, they have no Reason to complain. When the Wickedness of the Fathers is, with this good Effect, visited upon their Children, tho' the Matter of the Punishment seems to light upon the Children, it is yet in Truth a Punishment only to the wicked Parents; but to the Children it is a great Blessing, and what they will have Reason to bless God for to all Eternity. Such Punishments as this are like the *Pillar of the Cloud*, wherewith God once conducted the *Israelites* thro' the *Red Sea*; they have a double, and a very different Aspect; for, on the one Side, *viz.* that which looks towards the Parents, they are all Blackness, and Darknes, and Melancholy; they cannot but be heartily concerned at the Miseries which they have entailed upon their Posterity: But on the other Side, *viz.* that which looks towards the Children, they are all Light and Brightness, serving to direct them in the Way they are to go, and helping them to steer in the right Course to the heavenly *Canaan*, the Land of everlasting Blessedness.

Thus the divine Justice might be vindicated, in punishing, as it sometimes does, the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, tho' it be supposed that the Children themselves have done nothing to deserve Punishment. But then I add, in the fifth and last Place,

5. That whatever the temporal Evils and Afflictions are, wherewith God is at any Time pleased to punish the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, they are never more nor greater than the Children themselves do deserve to suffer, merely for their own Transgressions. And therefore they can have no Reason to think it hard that God is pleased to take Occasion, from the Sins of their Fathers, to inflict upon them those Plagues and Punishments, which otherwise perhaps he would not have inflicted; because, without Injustice, he might have laid the same upon them much sooner, and in a larger Measure, only upon the Account of their own personal Guilt and Transgression.

This was certainly the Case of the *Jews* who were carried captive to *Babylon*. They said, and perhaps truly, *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquity*; they said, and perhaps truly, *the Fathers have eaten sour Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge*; but they needed not to have looked farther for a Reason of all the Calamities that had befallen them, than to themselves only. They had *had* indeed a good King, who
after

after the wicked Reign of *Manasseh*, by which the People had been exceedingly corrupted, had shewn them an excellent Pattern, and had earnestly endeavoured to reform the State of Things; but it does not appear by the History, that the People were at all reformed by his Care. And therefore the Prophet *Ezekiel* sharply reproves them, when they were in the Captivity in *Babylon*, for laying the Blame of the Bondage which they then endured, only upon the Transgression of their Fathers in the Reign of *Manasseh*, as if they themselves had done nothing at all to deserve it. *What mean ye, that ye* Ezek. xviii. 2. *use this Proverb concerning the Land of Israel, saying, The Fathers have eaten four Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge?* He does not say, that there was not then, nor ever had been, any Ground in Fact for that proverbial Speech; but only asks the Question, *What mean ye*, to use this Proverb? In which Words it is not implied, that the Proverb was never true, but only that they in particular had no Reason to use it; that is, that they had done enough themselves to deserve all they suffered, and a great deal more, and so should not have needed, in Excuse as it were of themselves, to have laid all the Blame upon their Fathers. And therefore it follows in the next Verse, *As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not have Occasion any more to use this Proverb in Israel.* Which Words are not, as I suppose, to be understood, as if the Proverb might never be used; that is, as if God never had, nor never would inflict temporal Evils upon Children for the Sins of the Fathers; for he himself plainly declares the contrary, *Exod. xxxiv. 7.* and in more than ten Places besides, *Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children, and upon the Childrens Children, unto the third, and unto the fourth Generation;* and I have already had Occasion to mention several Examples of God's thus dealing with Men: But the Meaning of those Words, *Ye shall not have Occasion to use this Proverb*, I take to be this, that since they were so conceited of themselves, and stood so much in the Justification of their own Innocence; God was resolved to continue his Judgments upon them so long until their Eyes should be opened to see their own Guilt, and to be sensible that all the Sufferings which they had endured, had been no more than a just Punishment upon them for their own Transgression only; *Ye shall not have Occasion to use this Proverb any more.*

And this same, I doubt, is now our Case. Very willing we are to shift off the Blame from our selves, and to say, as in the Text, *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquity:* And, it may be, we have; I think it probable enough that we have done so; and particularly, that the innocent Blood shed as upon this Day, has since in many Instances been revenged upon us: But be it so, we, however, should not need to go so far off for a Reason of all our Calamities; because, if our Eyes be but open, we may easily see a sufficient Cause of them nearer Home. This I dare say, that whoever reads the History of the Times before that great Rebellion brake out, and compares the State of Things then with what it is now; I mean as to Matters of Religion and Morality; as to the Exercise of Piety, Justice, and Sobriety, will have little Reason to think that we are better than our Fathers; he will, I fear, rather have Reason to say that we are a great deal worse; so that we need not look farther than to our selves only, for a Cause of all those Evils that have befallen us, or which we have yet Cause to fear. Or if what we have hitherto suffered has been only for the Sins of our Fathers, we have Reason to fear, that as our Wickedness is, to all Appearance, greater than theirs, so our Posterity will live to see worse Times than we have done.

For then, in the Days of our Fathers, there was, at least, a Form of Godliness; and now there is hardly so much as that: Then the publick Devotions were performed regularly, the Churches duly frequented, the *Pater familias*

miliars followed to his Parish-Church by his whole Household; good Orders, and good Hours were then kept in Families; Children and Servants were catechised and taught their Duty; and that leisure Time from Business in Evenings, which is now by too many spent in intemperate Clubs, or in the Diversions of an impudent and ungodly Theatre, was then generally passed away in innocent and friendly Conversation among Neighbours, and in family Discipline and Devotion. Then Vice, however it might be secretly practised, was ashamed to be seen; there was no Prophaneness in the Streets: None had the Confidence then to speak openly against Religion, to *make a Mock at Sin*, to ridicule the holy Scriptures, to *deny the Lord that bought them*, to plead for Irreligion, to publish Blasphemy in Print, or to appear other than a Friend to Piety and Goodness: Nay, then the Stage it self, at least in Comparison with what it has been since, was chaste, modest, and virtuous. But what the State of Things is now, in all these Respects, I shall not need to observe; we all see it, and know it full well. And if I should say moreover, that there are some still among us as deeply tainted with those Principles of Sedition and Rebellion which brought about this Day's Tragedy, as any of their Fathers were, and who, if they had lived in their Days, would have been as forward as the forwardest of them were, in unhinging the Government, and destroying the Church; nay, and in bringing their Sovereign to the Block. Tho' some, perhaps, would be angry at my saying this, I fear it would be only for my speaking a Truth out of Season; and they, I believe, would be most angry with me for saying it, who best knew it to be a Truth.

Ezra ix. 13.

Upon the whole then, it being so apparent that we are not better than our Fathers, (I would to God I could say that we are not worse,) tho' it may be true, that we do in some measure bear their Iniquities, we have yet no Reason to complain; neither have we more Occasion than the *Jews* in Captivity had to use that Proverb, *The Fathers have eaten sour Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge*: But rather, I am sure, we may well use those Words of the Prophet *Ezra*, applying them to our selves, and say, *After all that is come upon us, for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespasts, our God has punished us less than our Iniquities deserve*; and he would have done so, altho' he had not granted us any of those wonderful Deliverances which he has been pleased in our great Extremities to vouchsafe unto us.

But whether *we* now have Reason to use that Proverb or not, it is certain that it may sometimes be used; it is certain, that God does sometimes *visit the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children*. And therefore, tho' when this happens, it is not, as I have shewn, to be complained of; yet we may at any Time, very reasonably and piously desire of God, that it may not so happen to us. And this was the third and last Point I propounded to speak to, *viz.*

III. To shew that it is a proper Matter of Petition or Prayer to God, that he would be pleased to cut off this Entail of Punishment, and not make us bear the Iniquities of our Fathers.

In this Sense, I observed before, the Words of the Text, considered as Part of a Prayer to God, may be understood, *viz.* as urging a Reason to move God to have Compassion upon his People in Captivity: *Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquities*: As if it had been said, "Hitherto we have born them, but let it be so now no longer; let thy Justice be satisfied with that Vengeance which thou hast already taken, in the Miseries which our Fathers endured in their own Persons, and which they lived to see brought upon us their Children by their Means; now therefore, since they *are not*, since they, being gone out of this World, are no longer sensible of those Evils which we suffer in it; we humbly pray thee, that thou

“ thou wouldst have Pity upon us their Children, and not afflict us any longer
 “ upon their Account: It is Time, we hope, now, that thou shouldst make a
 “ new Trial of us, and see if we will not behave our selves better than our
 “ Fathers did.

And there are other Examples in Scripture of Prayer or Petition of this Kind: *We have sinned with our Fathers*, says the Psalmist; *we have committed Iniquity, we have done wickedly; Our Fathers understood not thy Wonders in Egypt*; and so on. What could they mean by thus confessing the Sins of their Fathers; but to deprecate the Evils whereby those Sins had deserved to be punished in their Posterity? Psal. cvi. 6.

It is therefore an unreasonable Exception which some have made to that Petition in our Litany, *Remember not, Lord, our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers*; as if, (for that is what they would make the World believe of us,) we herein complied with the *Papists*, in praying for the Dead: But no such Matter, we do not herein pray for the Dead, for those who, as the Text expresses it, *are not*; we only pray for our selves, who are alive, that we may not bear their Iniquities. And what Petition can be better grounded and warranted than this is, when we are so plainly told in several Places of Scripture, that God does *visit the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children*?

And as causeless is their Anger, who are displeased with us for keeping this Day, as a Day of solemn Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, on which *to the Dishonour of our Nation, and the Reproach of the Reformed Religion*, the blessed King CHARLES the First was barbarously murdered by his own Subjects, the People of this Land; and that too in the most shameful Manner, tried in a pretended High Court of Justice, and by them sentenced to be executed as a Malefactor.

But why are they angry with us for keeping this Day? is it because they do not like that a Day of Fasting should be kept upon such an Occasion? Then, it seems, they approve of the Fact; they think it was well done; they think it was a Thing not to be ashamed or repented of: But, *Who can stretch forth his Hand against the Lord's Anointed, and be guiltless?* 1 Sam. xxvi. 9. If then we will take the Judgment of the Scripture before theirs, it was a Sin, and a great one too; and, if ever any single Act was such, it was a national Sin; for it was done by them that had then usurped the supreme Authority; and there was also too general a Consent of the People to it: There is good Reason therefore, that the whole Nation should be humbled and sorrowful for it, and with one Voice and Cry deprecate the Punishment thereof.

But it is a long while ago, they say, since this was done; it is fit therefore now that the Day should be laid aside: If it was a Sin, it was not, however, *our Sin*, but the Sin of *our Fathers*; and they *are not*: What matters it then to us what they did? They have answered for it to God, and received their own Doom; and why should we, who had no Hand at all in the Thing, take the Guilt of it upon our selves?

But if *our Fathers*, who *sinned*, *are not*, we may still bear their Iniquities; it is expressly said in Scripture, that God *visits the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children, even to the third and fourth Generation*. If then, we are still liable to the divine Judgments upon that Account, I think there is Reason good that we should still continue to pray, as we have hitherto done, that these Judgments may not befall us; but that God will *be reconciled to the Land*; and *when he makes Inquisition for Blood, not lay the Guilt of this innocent Blood to the Charge of the People of this Land, nor ever require it of us or our Posterity*. And it will be too soon to leave off praying thus; nay, it will, I think, be too soon so much as to enter into any Debate about it, until, at least, the Term of this express divine Threatning shall be expired, that is, until the *third and fourth Generation* shall be past and gone, and

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the Children, and the Childrens Children shall be gathered unto their Fathers.

And more than this needs not, I hope, be said upon this Point, to those who, by their Presence in this Place, upon this Occasion, do sufficiently shew their Approbation of the keeping this Day, and that they think there is but too great Reason for it. For I will not suppose it possible that any of you have been now mocking of God, while you have seemed to be praying to him.

I only add therefore, that to make the Prayers we have now put up to God availing, we must forsake our Sins, as well as confess them. As therefore we have been now confessing that they were *the crying Sins of this Nation that brought down this heavy Judgment upon us*; so let us be careful that we *sin no more, lest a worse Thing come unto us*. And as we have been praying that God would *not lay to our Charge the Guilt of that innocent Blood, which was as this Day shed*; so let us be cautious never to give Consent to any such Sin, nor to any Approaches towards it.

This is the Way to get the Entail of Punishment cut off; I do not say, that this will certainly do it; for we have Instances in Scripture, of the Sins of Fathers punished in their Children, even when the Children were not such Sinners as the Fathers had been: But that this is the likeliest Means we can use to do it; and that without this there can be no reasonable Expectation that it should be done.

In a Word then, and to conclude all: That the whole Nation may be reformed, let every one of us take Care to amend himself. And that the Government both in Church and State may be maintained, and our holy Religion and the publick Peace preserved, which, I hope, is what we do all heartily desire. Let every one of us mind his own Business, and move regularly in his own Sphere, and leave it to Kings to govern Nations, and to God to govern the World.

And when by our Afflictions we shall be brought to this religious, loyal, humble, peaceable and contented Temper; then, and not before, we may reasonably look to see good Times; then we may pray, and reasonably hope it will be with good Success, that God will *comfort us again now, after the Time that he has plagued us, and for the Tears wherein we have suffered Adversity*.

Which God of his Goodness grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.



DISCOURSE CIV.

The Divine Institution of Magistracy, and the gracious Design of its In- stitution.

Preached March 8. 1708. being the Day of Her
Majesty's happy Accession to the Throne.



R o m. XIII. 4.

He is the Minister of God to thee for good.



THE main Design of the *Apostle* in the first half of this Chapter, is to teach the Duty of Subjects, and to press the Practice thereof.

Their Duty in general he declares to be *Subjection*; that is, both Submission to the Authority of their Governors, and Obedience to their Laws; Ver. 1. *Let every Soul be sub-*

ject to the higher Powers.

And the Reasons or Motives whereby in that, and in the following Verses, he enforces this Duty, are chiefly two; both which are also intimated in the Text, viz. 1. The divine Institution of Magistracy; *He is the Minister of God*: And, 2. The gracious Design of its Institution; *for good*: *He is the Minister of God to thee for good*. Both which Points I shall therefore now in Order speak to; and the Consideration of them both may serve as well to suggest to the Magistrate his Duty, as to bind Subjects to theirs; and likewise for several other good Purposes, some of which I shall note as I go along.

I. One Thing here declared, is the divine Institution of Magistracy; *He is the Minister of God*: Which Words do import two Things: 1. That it is of God, or by divine Appointment, that some do bear Rule over others; And, 2. That the Authority exercised by the Magistrate is a Ray or Portion of the divine Authority, communicated to him, and entrusted with him by God.

1. That it is of God, or by divine Appointment, that some do bear Rule over others.

I do not say, that the particular Form of Government is, in every Nation, especially prescribed by God. I see no Reason to affirm that it was always so, even in *Judea* itself; and much less that it has been ordinarily so, in any other Nation.

Neither do I say, that the Person bearing the Office of Magistracy is always of divine Designation and Appointment; or that he is nominated to his Office by God; and that no Person, not so designed or nominated, may lawfully bear it. For the Titles and Claims to Government have been various; of several of the *Jewish* Judges and Kings, the Title was indeed such a special divine Appointment; but of the first Kings that ever were in the World, the Title was, most probably, only their paternal Right to rule and govern their own Children and Descendents: And in other Countries, and in later Times, of some the Title has been Election, and of others hereditary Succession: And of all the Kings now reigning in the World, and claiming to do so by hereditary Succession, there is not perhaps any one whose Title was not originally founded in Election or Conquest. It is most reasonable therefore now, that in every Place *that* should be taken to be the most *rightful Government* which is established; *the Powers that be are ordained of God*; and *that the best Title* to Government which has prevailed by Prescription, or is settled by the Constitution: And whoever in any Place, should now set up himself upon any other Title, would be but a Disturber of the Peace of the World; would be the Author of much Confusion, and might justly be treated as an Enemy to his Country.

I do not, I say, therefore, affirm either that the Form of Government in every Place, is, or ought to be, of divine Prescription; or that the Person exercising the same is always of divine Designation, any otherwise than as all Changes and Revolutions in Government are brought about by the working or Permission of the divine Providence: In which Sense the *Psal-*
mist says, that *God is the Judge, he putteth down one, and setteth up another*; and the Prophet *Daniel*, that *the most High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*; and that *he removeth Kings and setteth up Kings*: And the Prophet *Jeremy*, that God had given, among other Lands, the Land of *Judea* into the Hand of *Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon* his Servant, because in his Providence he had permitted him, tho' without any just Title thereto, to make a Conquest thereof.

But whatever the Form of Government be, that, whether by divine Appointment, or by Consent, or Constitution, is received and established in any Countrey; and whether the Person who has the Administration of the same be, in any other Sense than only providentially, of divine Designation, or not; what I say and affirm, is, that the Government it self, which he exercises and administers, is of divine Institution; that is, that it is the Will of God that some should bear Rule, and that others should be in Subjection; and that they which bear Rule, should enact Laws for the Preservation of Justice and Peace among their Subjects, and duly execute the Laws made for that Purpose: In which two Things, the whole Power and Exercise of Sovereignty do consist.

And that Magistracy it self is thus of divine Institution, is the least, I think, that can be understood to be meant in those Words of *Solomon*, Prov. viii. 15. *By me Kings reign, and Princes decree Justice*; or by those of the *Apostle* at the first Verse of this Chapter; *There is no Power but of God; the Powers that be are ordained of God*. Or by *St. Peter*, 1 *Epist.* ii. 13. *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the King, as supreme, or unto Governors, as unto them*
 that

Psal. lxxv. 7.

Dan. iv. 17.

— ii. 22.

Jer. xxvi. 6.

that are sent by him, for the Punishment of evil Doers, and for the Praise of them that do well. But,

II. When the Magistrate is called here *the Minister of God*; the Meaning, I suppose, is no more than this, *viz.* not only that the Office it self is by divine Appointment or Institution; but also, that the Authority by which the Magistrate acts, and the Power which he exercises in the Execution of his Office, is a Ray or Portion of the divine Authority and Power, derived to him from, and communicated to him by, God.

For the *Apostle* here says, he is a *Minister*, that is, a *Servant*, and if *Servant* to another, then plainly, not his own Master, and if not Master of himself, much less can he be, in his own Right, Master of another. The Authority therefore by which he acts, the Power which he exercises in the Government of his Subjects, are not, properly, his own, are not natural or essential to his Person, are not inherently in himself; but must be derived to him from that superior Being who has Authority over both him and his Subjects; who can commission him to bear Rule over them, and can lay it as a Duty upon them to be subject to him.

And so it follows in the Text; he is *the Minister*, or the *Servant*, of *God*. And it must needs be so; if he be any Body's *Servant*, it must be *God's*: For it would be absurd to say, that he is *their Servant* over whom he bears Rule; because that would be in Effect to say, that it is all one to command, and to obey; to have Power over, and to be subject to.

I do not indeed deny but that, according to the Constitution of some Countries, the Magistrate, even the highest Magistrate of all, may be chosen to his Office by the People. It is plainly so, in all elective Kingdoms, where the supreme human Power is placed in one nominated by the People, in one who before such Nomination had no more Right to it than any other Man, and who, according to the Constitution of the Country, could not lawfully have been put into the Possession of it any other Way: But nevertheless I say, that even in this Case, though the People name the Person, they do not give him his Authority; they chuse the Officer, but when that is done, he is *God's Officer*, not theirs; *He is the Minister of God*, not the *Servant of the People*; he has his Commission and Authority from God, though he had his Nomination from them. And if it be the sovereign Power of all, which according to the Constitution, he is, by virtue of such Election, chosen to, being possessed of that, he has no Superior but God; he has none above him upon Earth, to question, censure or punish him; and *whosoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God*.

And in this there is no Incongruity or Absurdity at all. It should not therefore, methinks, be so strange to any, as some seem to think it, that the sovereign Power upon Earth should be subject only to God, and not be accountable to the People; not even although he became at first possessed of such Power only by their Suffrage, or by their voluntary Acceptance of him; and much less if he came to it by any other Title: Especially, there being Instances of the like Nature continually before our Eyes; I mean, wherein the Officer has his Nomination from one, and receives his Authority from another; and is accountable for the Exercise of his Power, not to those that chose him, but to some Power superior both to him and them, from whom, after he was chosen, he had his Authority to act.

For thus it is with us, in all Corporations that have Charters, and it may be, in some others; they are empowered by their Charters, or claim by Prescription, to chuse their own Mayor, or other chief Magistrate; but when he is chosen, it is from the Queen that he has his Authority; and after he

is placed in his Office, he is not their Servant that chose him, but their Governor. And in Case he should mis-behave himself in his Office; he is not accountable to those that chose him to it, but to the Queen, by whose Commission he acted in it. They indeed may complain of him, or bear witness against him; but it belongs to that superior Power, Superior both to him and them, from whom he had his Authority, to judge, whether he did mis-behave himself or not; and, if he did, to inflict on him a proper Punishment.

Ver. 1.

Ver. 2.

Nay, this was in Truth the very Case of the *Roman Emperors*, in the Apostolical Times; they were chosen Emperors by the Army, or the Senate; but the Dignity they were chosen to was *Imperial*, their Power, consequently, was sovereign. And therefore, to them, as invested with such Authority, the *Apostle* here in this Chapter, declares it to be the Duty of every other Person, not excepting the Electors themselves, to be subject; *Let every Soul be subject to the higher Powers.* Of them, in Possession of the Imperial Dignity, he speaks, when he says, *There is no Power but of God; the Powers that be are ordained of God.* Against them, being invested with sovereign Authority, he declares it to be unlawful for the Subjects to make Resistance; and denounces *Damnation* to such as dare to do it. With regard to them, (for it must have been with a special Regard to the Emperors then reigning, whether it was *Claudius* or *Nero*, both of them very bad ones) he says, *Whoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God;* and lastly; it was of one of them, that he says here in the Text, *He is the Minister of God;* that is, he acts by a divine Commission; and the Power which he regularly exercises is delegated to him by God.

And it must needs be so, the supreme Magistrate must have his Power from God; because he can have it no other Way; for that it is not originally and essentially in himself, has been already shewn; and that he cannot have it from the People is evident, because it is such a Power as the People never had, nor could have; and what they have not themselves, they cannot give to another.

Ver. 4.

For Instance; the supreme Magistrate has, by the Consent of all, the Power of Life and Death; he *bears the Sword*, the *Apostle* here says; and he bears it, he farther says, *not in vain*; he may therefore warrantably make use of it, as there is Occasion to cut off evil Doers: But now I say this Power cannot be given to him by the People, because it is what they themselves have not. For no Man, as a private Man, has Power over his Brother's Life; but he would be a Murderer, should he, of his own Head, kill even a Malefactor: Nay, no Man has Power over his own Life, not even in those Cases wherein the Magistrate, by the Allowance of all, has Power over it: For a private Man would be *Felo de se*, should he, though immediately after he had murdered another, and for that very Reason too, kill himself; and yet when this Crime, his having murdered another, is confessed in Court, or fully proved against him before the Magistrate, it may with much better Reason be doubted whether the Magistrate can lawfully pardon him, God himself having said, *who so sheddeth Man's Blood, by Man shall his Blood be shed*, than whether he may lawfully condemn him to suffer the Death he has deserved.

Gen. ix. 6.

And as this Authority could not be granted to Magistrates by single Men, no Man singly having Power over his own or another's Life, so neither could it be granted by the Community: For how should they, in a Body, or as in Company, come to have a greater Power, than was among them all the while they were single?

Besides, this Position, that *the sovereign Power of the supreme Magistrate is derived to him from the aggregate Body of the People, as by their Grant or Concession*; as it is directly contrary to what the *Apostle* here affirms, *viz.*

that *there is no Power but of God*; so it is plainly grounded upon a Supposition that is false in Fact; *viz.* that there were a great Number of Men living together upon the Earth before the first Institution of civil Government; which whole Multitude had then by natural Right, the same Power over single Men, which is now exercised by the Magistrate.

This indeed might possibly have been true, in Case this Multitude had sprung together out of the Earth; or if they had been all created by God at one and the same Time: but it cannot be true upon Supposition that they all descended from the same first Parents, *Adam* and *Eve*; for it being so, no Man, except only the first Man of all, ever came into the World, but he was naturally, at the very Instant of his Birth, in a State of Subjection to some other Man: No Man, since the first, was ever, properly speaking, free-born. For in his natural Capacity, he was born a Subject to his own Parents, and in his political Capacity, to the King, or other chief Governor of that Kingdom or State, of which, at his Birth, he became a Member. The People could not therefore give to any Man that Authority over either themselves or others, which they themselves never had; they could not give to another what was not their own to give; they could not give to one Man what another Man was then in the lawful Possession of.

Thus, I hope, it appears, that Government is of divine Institution, and that the Authority of those that are placed in Government is from God; both which, I suppose, were meant by the *Apostle*, in these Words, *he is the Minister of God*.

And from this Truth, these following Things may fairly be inferred.

1. That it ought to be a main Part of the Magistrate's Care, indeed his chiefest Care of all, to promote the Honour of God, whose *Minister he is*.

Should I go about to declare, how, or by what Means, he may best do this, I might be thought, perhaps, to touch too nearly upon Politicks; and therefore I wholly forbear that. But I hope it may pass for good Divinity, and nothing more, to say in general, that the Magistrate, even the sovereign Power of all, being a Subject of God, being, as the *Apostle* here says, *the Minister*, or the Servant, *of God*, being put in Trust by God, and acting in whatever he does, as a Magistrate, in God's Name, and by his Commission, ought, in the whole Administration of his high Office, to have an Eye to God's Glory; and consequently to provide, the best he can, by wholesome Laws, and a due and prudent Execution of them, for the perpetual Establishment of the true Religion, and for the well instructing of all his Subjects therein; for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the effectual Suppression of all Prophaness, Vice, and Immorality. For of the *King, as Supreme*, as well as of subordinate *Governors and Magistrates*, the *Apostle* says, that they are sent by God, *for the Punishment of evil Doers, and for the Praise of them that do well*. 1 Pet. ii. 14.

2. If the Magistrate be *the Minister*, or the Servant *of God*, then he, as well as his People, is subject to another Power, even to the great God of Heaven and Earth, *by whom Kings reign*, and who is *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*. Then he, no less than they, must expect to be called to Account Prov. viii. 15.
1 Tim. vi. 15. for all the Talents his great Master was pleased to entrust him with; and that he may be able to give a comfortable Account thereof, it ought to be his Endeavour, as it is most certainly his Duty, to employ all his Authority and Power for those good Purposes for which they were given to him by God; that is, to protect his Subjects from Violence and Injury, to maintain Religion and Justice, and to preserve Peace among Men.

For although he be not (the highest Power of all most certainly is not) accountable to any upon Earth; because there is none upon Earth superior to him; (and none can be accountable for what they do to any but to such as

have Power over them, to question, to controll, to punish them) yet, with Regard to God, he is upon the same Level with the meanest of his Subjects; he is under the same Obligation in Duty, he is under a stronger Obligation in Gratitude, to behave himself well in *his* Station, that they are under to do the same in *theirs*; and therefore, if he be failing in what is required of him, must look for no more Mercy from God, the righteous Judge of all, than will be afforded to others of inferior Rank that are alike guilty.

Eph. vi. 9.

2 Chron. xix.
6, 7.

By this Argument the *Apostle* exhorts Masters to discharge faithfully the Duties that are laid upon them, with Relation to their Servants; *Ye Masters, do the same Things unto your Servants, knowing that your Master also is in Heaven, neither is there Respect of Persons with him.* And his Argument is of the same Force to engage all other Superiors to the like Care; for as the Master has a Master in Heaven, so has the Judge a Judge, the Ruler a Ruler, the King himself a King. And, as we are told in *Job xxxiv. 19. God accepteth not the Persons of Princes, nor regardeth the Rich more than the Poor, for they are all the Work of his Hands.* Therefore take Heed what ye do, said *Jehosaphat*, in his Charge to his Judges, *for ye judge not for Man, but for the Lord, and there is no Iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of Persons.*

Acts v. 29.

1 Pet. ii. 13.

3. If the Magistrate be *the Minister of God*, acting by his Commission, and exercising a delegated Authority under him, then it must needs be the Duty of Subjects, a Branch of that Duty which they owe to God himself, to yield Obedience to all those Laws and Constitutions of their earthly Governors, which they, not exceeding the Powers granted them by their Commission, shall, in their Wisdom, think fit to enact, for the Preservation of Justice, and Peace, and good Order among their Subjects; that is, they are to obey them in whatsoever they commands, that is not contrary to the divine Law; for I know no other Bounds or Restraints set to the sovereign Magistrate's Authority but that. If indeed he command what God has forbidden, or forbids what God has commanded, he takes upon him to do more than he has Authority for; and in that Case, *we ought to obey God rather than Men*: But in all other Cases, the Laws of the State are to be punctually obeyed, though we see not the Reason of them; nay, though they should appear to us not so well consulted, nor so prudently contrived as they might have been; and this, not only to escape the Penalty of the Law, but also out of Conscience towards God. *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lord's sake*, says St. Peter. And *ye must needs be subject, not only for Wrath, but also for Conscience sake*, says our *Apostle*, at the fifth Verse of this Chapter. And upon this Ground it is, that in *Tit. iii. 1.* he says it as a Duty upon all Preachers of the Gospel, to be very earnest and frequent in pressing this Point upon their Hearers. *Put them in Mind*, says he, *to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates.*

— 19.

Nay, though the Laws of our earthly Governors should, in some Instances, be contrary to the divine Laws, upon which Supposition the Magistrate does certainly exceed the Bounds of his Commission, yet this does not void their Authority; they are *the Ministers of God* for all this; or else there were none that were so, there were none that could be called so, when the *Apostle* wrote this *Epistle*; and there is a Duty lying on Subjects, even in this Case; *viz.* not to oppose, nor to resist the Power; but quietly and patiently to suffer the Penalty of those Laws which they cannot, without sinning against God, yield an active Obedience to. *Whosoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God*, says our *Apostle*, *and they that resist shall receive to themselves Damnation.* And, *this*, says another *Apostle*, *is thank-worthy, if a Man for Conscience towards God, endure Grief, suffering wrongfully.*

4. Lastly; If the civil Magistrate be *the Minister of God*, that is, if he acts by a divine Commission, and all the Authority he has over others be derived from God; then even his Authority, though he be the highest of all earthly Powers, is not absolute and unlimited; then he can act with Authority no farther, nor otherwise, than as he is warranted to do by his Commission; and then also, the same God, the sovereign Lord of all, who has granted him a Commission for one Purpose, may grant another Commission to another Person, for another Purpose.

I mean plainly this; which is not only a Supposition of what might be, but is also true in Fact, God has given the civil Magistrate Commission and Authority to govern well all the People committed to his Charge, to enact and execute all needful Laws for the Preservation of Justice and Peace among his Subjects; nay, and to him also it appertains to provide for the Establishment of the true Religion, and for the regular Exercise thereof; and God has also armed him with the Power of the Sword, to cut off evil Doers of all Sorts; that is, not only those who invade the civil Rights of others, but likewise such as *turn Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction*; and from Subjection to this Authority of the civil Magistrate, or supreme legislative Power, no Order of Men whatsoever is exempt: He is *Supreme in all Causes, and over all Persons*; *Let every Soul, says the Apostle, be subject to the higher Powers*. But it is not within the Commission of the civil Magistrate, as such, to baptize, to preach the Gospel, to serve at the Altar, to excommunicate, to absolve, and to minister in holy Things. The Power of performing these sacred Offices is granted by another Commission, and to another Order of Men; and *they* have their Authority to do these Things as immediately from God, as the civil Magistrate has his. For it was not to the civil Magistrate, but to *them*, that our Saviour said, *Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature*: It was to *them*, that is, only to his *Apostles*, and their Successors in the Ministry of the Gospel by lawful Ordination, that he said, *Go, and disciple all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all Things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World*. It was to *them* that he gave in Command, to do after his Decease, and to continue to do until his second Coming, what he himself had just then before done, when *He took Bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the Disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my Body; and when he took the Cup, and gave Thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the Remission of Sins*. And lastly, it was to *them* that he said, *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you; whose soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever Sins ye retain, they are retained*.

Well! But what if the civil Magistrate will take upon him to do these Things in Person? Or what if he should presume, by his own Authority only, to command or commission others, not qualified by lawful Ordination, to do them?

I answer, he may do so, if he will; for who should hinder him? But what he does of this Kind, being done without sufficient Authority, must certainly be done without Effect. He may do so, if he will; and if he that does so be the supreme Magistrate of all, there is no Power upon Earth that I know of to correct or punish him for his Fault: But *he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they*: There is certainly a Power above, that both can and will punish Offenders, though they be of the highest Rank; and *mighty Men shall be mightily tormented*.

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He may therefore, if he pleases, say to the Priests, as *Corah* and his Company did to *Moses* and *Aaron*, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the Congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up your selves above the Congregation of the Lord?*

¹ Sam. xiii. 9. Or he may, as King *Saul* did, usurp the Priest's Office, when after a long waiting for *Samuel* to no Purpose, he himself offered a *Burnt-Offering*, thinking himself, as he said, under a Sort of Necessity of doing it, because of

² Chron. xxvi. 16. his present Distress; and as was done by King *Uzziah* afterwards, when he went into the Temple of the Lord, to burn Incense upon the Altar of Incense.

¹ Kings xii. 31. Or lastly, he may do, as King *Jeroboam* did, who made, or consecrated, by his own Authority only, *Priests of the lowest of the People, which were not of the Sons of Levi*; but I am sure, if he believes the Truth of those Histories, he will have but little Encouragement to follow those Examples; especially, if he considers farther, that all that do the like Things, are guilty before God of the like Fault, though they may not be always alike punished for it in this World.

The Magistrate then has his Authority from God; *He is the Minister of God*; and so have likewise the Dispensers of his holy Word and Sacraments; they, as to the spiritual Powers which they are entrusted with, are not the Servants of the State, but *the Ministers of Jesus Christ*.

There is therefore no such Absurdity as some would make us believe, in two distinct Powers, within the same State or Nation, so much independent on each other as these are supposed to be. Neither, methinks, should the Notion of it in this Case seem at all strange or uncouth, when it is no more than we see every Day in other Instances. For do not the Mayors or other chief Magistrates, in every City and Corporation within this Kingdom, act, all alike, by Commission from the Queen, as Sovereign over all, without deriving any Authority from one another? And within the same City, does not the same sovereign Power grant diverse Commissions, to diverse Persons, for diverse Purposes; to every one of which, all the Inhabitants of that City are bound to be in Subjection? And do not all the Persons so commissioned, move and act, each in his proper Sphere, without more Dependence on each other than the Sovereign is pleased to contrive and order? What more Absurdity then is there, in a King's discharging the King's Duty, and a Priest the Priest's, supposing that neither of them does receive his Authority from the other, but from God?

Neither can any such publick Inconvenience as some imagine, or at least would make other People apprehend, ever follow from the Establishment of two such independent Powers; upon Supposition that they both receive their proper Authority from a Power that is superior to them both, and that they are both subject to his Regulation and Correction; provided also that both these subordinate Powers do keep within the Bounds of their proper Commissions; and if they do not, he, by whose Authority they both act, and who is superior to them both, knows how to lay the Blame where the Fault lies, and is able to maintain his own supreme Authority over them both. For we see the same Thing every Day in other Instances; every City, every Town has its proper Officers, and those of various Sorts, and to various Purposes; but nevertheless, having all of them their Authority from the same sovereign Power of the State, and every one of them having his proper Business assigned him, they all move regularly, every one in his own proper Sphere, without giving one another any Manner of Disturbance. And therefore so likewise may the civil Magistrate, and the Minister of the Gospel do, tho' they have neither of them their Commission from the other, but both from God: Nay, so they must do, if they both act within the Bounds of their respective Commissions; for their Commissions are of different

Kinds, and to quite different Purposes; their Businesses do no Ways interfere with, or hinder each other, but rather quite otherwise. For the Priest's Power is no Diminution at all to the King's; nay it rather tends to establish it; it being one Thing, among others, given him in Charge by God, to put the People in Mind to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates. And, on the other Side, the kingly Power is no Hindrance at all to the Priest in the Discharge of his ministerial Office: It may be, and it oftentimes is, very helpful and assistant to him therein; it is always so, when according to the Promise of God made long ago to his Church, and which we have the Happiness to see verified among us, Kings are her nursing Fathers, and Queens her nursing Mothers. Tit. iii. 1. Isa. xlix. 23.

Well! But what if these two Powers should clash? Would not that be a great Inconvenience?

Yes, most certainly: And so it would be, in any Kingdom, in any State, in any City, if the subordinate Magistrates and Officers, all acting by the Sovereign's Commission, and who had every one their several Offices assigned them, should clash, or should encroach upon one another. But the Possibility of such an Inconvenience happening from such a Constitution, is no Reason why Things should not be so constituted; because however otherwise they were ordered, they would still be liable to some Inconvenience or other, from the irregular Lusts and Passions of Men; much less is it an Argument and Proof, against Fact, that they are not so constituted. And in Case this should happen, still, as was said before, there is a Remedy; for it being supposed that all these subordinate Officers are subject to one supreme Power, he will know where to lay the Blame, and he will be able to punish the Offender, whoever he be, that dares to assume or exercise an Authority that was not granted him.

But let us see however, at last, what would be the Consequence, in Case the civil and Ecclesiastical Officer, under God the sovereign Lord of all, should clash or interfere; or should either of them encroach upon the other; and let us see, what in that Case would be to be done, by the one, or by the other of them; or by the People, supposed to be subject to them both.

Suppose then, *First*, that the Priest, as such, takes upon him to act as a civil Magistrate. What must be said in this Case, is, that most certainly he is highly to blame for his so doing; there being plainly no such Power within his Commission as a Priest. For if the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Head over all Things to the Church, was not, as himself own'd, of this World; much less can that of his Ministers be so. Eph. i. 22. John xviii. 26.

The Remedy therefore of this Inconvenience is very obvious; and the civil Magistrate has it in his own Power. For seeing the Man was not, by his being ordained a Priest, discharged from his Allegiance to his Sovereign, nor made less subject to him than he was before; the Prince has still full Power over him, to deal with him just as he would, or might, do with any other of his Subjects that was guilty of the like Crime; he may amerce, he may imprison him; he may, if his Offence be what the Law has made capital, condemn him to Death; and will be justified before God, and in his own Conscience, for so doing; nay, he would be to blame if he should not do so: For he beareth not the Sword in vain; but is a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him, whosoever he be, that doth evil.

Or put Case, *Secondly*, that the Prince takes upon him, in Virtue of his sovereign Authority, wholly to prohibit the Priests in the Exercise of their ministerial Office; that he forbids them to preach the Gospel within his Dominion, to baptise any of his Subjects, to hold any Assemblies for Christian Worship, or the like; the Consequence of this would be, that the

- Gal. i. 1. Priests, the Ministers of Jesus Christ, being not of Men, neither by Man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the Dead, would be still bound to go on in the doing of their Duty; and if thereupon he should question them for their Disobedience to his Order, it would be their Part to say, as the Apostles did in the like Case to the Rulers of the Jews, Acts iv. 19. *Whether it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* And if after this, he should proceed farther to punish them for it, it would then be their Duty to behave themselves as the Apostles likewise did in that Case; that is, to suffer meekly and quietly, the Confiscation of their Goods, the Imprisonment of their Persons, or even Ver. 14. Death it self; and to rejoyce that they were accounted worthy to suffer, for the Name of Christ. For if ye suffer for Righteousness sake, says the Apostle, 1 Pet. iii. 14. *happy are ye; and be not afraid of their Terror, neither be troubled.* And again, Let them that suffer according to the Will of God, commit — iv. 19. *the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

Or let it be supposed farther, *Thirdly*, that the Prince, whether with or without a Prohibition to the lawfully ordained Ministers of the Gospel, takes upon himself to exercise their proper Office; or, by Virtue of his supreme Authority over all, to appoint others, not lawfully ordained, to perform it; what would be the Consequence of this? and what would be the Priest's Duty in this Case?

I answer; the Consequence would be, that, as was said before, there would be a perfect Nullity in every Thing that the Prince did of this Kind; and the Priest's Duty in this Case would be, to remonstrate to the Prince in the most decent and respectful Manner, the Unlawfulness of such his Attempt; nay, and to withstand him too, with such a Sort of Force as the most dutiful Son might use to restrain and hold back his Father from running into a Fire, or falling into a Pit; as the Priests of the Temple did, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, 17, 19. *when their King went into the Temple of the Lord, to burn Incense upon the Altar of Incense: They went in after him, says the Text, and withstood Uzziah the King, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee to burn Incense unto the Lord, but to the Priests, the Sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn Incense. Go out of the Sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed, neither shall it be for thine Honour from the Lord God.* Thus much, I say, the Priests may say and do; but if by all this the Prince will not be restrained from his sacrilegious Attempt, I know nothing more that they can lawfully do, but only refer the Matter to the Judgment of God; who did in that Case of Uzziah sufficiently vindicate the Honour of his own Institution; and will always do so, in such Manner as to his infinite Wisdom shall seem best.

Or *Lastly*, for I think this is the only Case different from the three former that can be put, let it be supposed that these two Powers do direct or order contrary Things: And here the Question will be, how the People, who are supposed to be subject to both these Powers, ought in that Case to behave themselves. And the Impossibility of the People's observing both their Orders, is mightily urged as an unanswerable Argument that there cannot be two such independent Powers within the same State or Nation.

But why not? Why not a Prince and a Priest, each acting by Commission from God, as well as a Prince and a Father; to both whom the same Person, as a Subject to one, and as Son to the other, is obliged by the Law of God to yield Obedience? For neither does the Prince receive his kingly Power over this Person from the Father; nor does the Father receive his fatherly Power over him from the Prince; but both have their several respective Powers over him by divine Institution: And it is as possible that the Prince and the Father should order contrary Things, as that the Prince and the Priest should

should do so. Let them therefore who make this such a wonderful Difficulty, say, what the Son is to do in that Case, and then they will readily discern what the Subject is to do in this.

Now it is certain that no Law of the State can wholly vacate the Father's Authority over his Son, so as to make it lawful in the general for a Son to disobey his Father; and yet the Father himself being a Subject of the State, the Exercise of his paternal Power may be restrained in some particular Instances, by the Laws of the State; so as that it may not be lawful either for him to command, or for the Son at his Command to do, some particular Things, which he, unless so restrained, might lawfully have required; and the Son, unless the State had forbidden them, had been bound, at his Father's Command, to have done.

And the Case is the same here; the Priest being, as well as the civil Magistrate, *the Minister of God*, the civil Magistrate cannot vacate his Commission. No Law of the State can make it lawful for the People to deny or refuse all Obedience to their spiritual Guides, to those *who*, as the *Apostle* expresses it, *are over them in the Lord*; for that would be to make void a Law of God, commanding the People to *obey them that have the Rule over them*, 1 Theff. v. 12. and to *submit themselves*: But then *the Ministers of Christ* being themselves (no less than the People committed to their Charge) obliged to be *subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates, Let every Soul be subject to the higher Powers*; it plainly follows, that their Power and Authority over their People, though, as to its Original, that is, as it is derived immediately from God, it may be said to be co-ordinate with the Magistrate's; yet as to the Exercise of it, in some Particulars, is subordinate thereto, and subject to such Regulations as are lawfully prescribed thereby. Heb. xiii. 17.

And therefore in a *Christian Kingdom* or State, and I have no Occasion now to consider any other Case, the Priest, the *Minister of Jesus Christ*, cannot, in Opposition to the supreme Power of the Nation, lay any Thing as a Duty on the Consciences of the People, but what he can prove to be so from that Gospel of *Christ*, of which he is ordained a Minister. But the supreme Magistrate's Authority, even in religious as well as civil Cases, is more extensive: The proper Subject-Matter of his Power is whatsoever God has given no Order about, one Way or the other; and every Law of his is good and binding to all his Subjects, which is not contrary to a divine Law.

So that to know whose Order is to be observed, in Case they should order contrary Things, the single Point to be considered, is, whether the Matter about which they do give out different or contrary Orders, be a Thing which the Law of God has given any Direction about, or not? for if it be, there is no Question to be made, but that the Direction given about it by God himself is to be punctually observed, whosoever he be that orders the contrary: And on the other Side, if it be a Matter about which the Law of God has given no Direction, there is no more Doubt to be made but that the Prince's Order is to be observed rather than the Priest's; because even the Priest himself is subject to the Prince in all such Things; and if he himself cannot be justified in disobeying any such Order of the State, much less can any Order of his justify others in the like Disobedience.

And now, having spoken sufficiently, as I suppose, of the divine Institution of Magistracy; which was the first Point I was to speak to; I should proceed to speak somewhat of the other; *viz.*

II. The gracious Design of its Institution; *He is the Minister of God to thee for Good.*

And here it would be easy, if I had now Time for it, to shew, both that the Good of the People was the Design of God in his Appointment of Magistrates;

gistrates; and also that this Design of God is very well answered; that it is indeed much for the People's Good that they are thus put in Subjection to the Power of the Magistrate; that they do indeed lead their Lives here more quietly and comfortably under the Restraint of Government, than they could possibly do without it, in Case (and that would be the Case then) every Man might do what was right in his own Eyes.

And from the Consideration of both these Things it would be easy to shew, by Way of Inference, both the Magistrate's and the Subject's Duty, with Regard to each other. For,

1. If the Magistrate was ordained *for the Good* of the People, and this was the Design of God in appointing him to his high Office; then this also ought to be his Design in the Administration and Execution of it. It must needs therefore be his Duty, to the utmost of his Power, to defend them from Violence, to protect them in their Rights, to preserve them in Peace; neither to oppress them himself, nor to suffer them to be oppressed by those that are put in Authority under him: And, in a Word, to promote all the Ways he can, both their spiritual and their temporal Welfare.

2. If it be *for the Good* of the *People themselves* that they are put in Subjection to Magistrates, then it is plainly their Duty, and a very reasonable one too, to be contented and well pleased with their Lot of Subjection: And not only so, but likewise with all Willingness and Chearfulness to yield such Obedience and Submission to their Governors as is due; and to make them the best Returns they are able for the great Benefits which they receive from their Care and Labour, by a most thankful Acknowledgment of the same.

And if I was speaking to this Point, in any other Place but this, especially on this Day of your Majesty's happy Accession to your Throne, it would be an unpardonable Omission, not to take particular Notice of our own Happiness in this present Reign; or not to shew the manifold Obligations that we and all your Majesty's Subjects are under, both to accept with all Thankfulness the many and great Benefits we receive from, and have now long enjoyed under your Majesty's most gracious and auspicious Government; and also to make the best Returns we can for the same, in such a dutiful Respect to your Majesty's Person, and such a willing Obedience to your Majesty's Commands, as are fit to be paid by the most obliged People to the best of Princes.

3. Lastly; The *Good* of the *People* being the chief Thing designed by God in his Institution of Government; and it being also what, by God's Blessing on his own Institution, is always (even under the worst constituted, and under the worst managed Government) in good Measure and Degree procured thereby; it must needs be farther incumbent on Subjects, in Consideration of the Benefits they receive from the Magistrate's Care and Protection, above all Things to return their hearty Thanks to Almighty God for this great Blessing; because in Truth it is from God, as the Fountain, that all good Things do come; by whose soever Hand, or by whatsoever Means, they are conveyed to Men: And likewise to put up constantly their humble Petitions to the same Almighty Being, for the Continuance of this Blessing; because, as *Solomon* says, *The King's Heart is in the Hand of the Lord, as the Rivers of Water; He turneth it whither soever he will.* And to both these Duties we are exhorted by the *Apostle*, *1 Tim. ii. 1. I exhort, that first of all, Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and giving of Thanks be made for Kings, and for all that are in Authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life in all Godliness and Honesty.*

But I have not Time now to prosecute these Points, nor so much as to mention several other Things which might be usefully observed and spoken to upon this Occasion.

I shall therefore conclude all with a good *Collect* of our Church; containing, I think, the most proper Application I could make of this whole Discourse.

Almighty God, whose Kingdom is everlasting and Power infinite, have Mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the Heart of thy chosen Servant Anne our Queen and Governor, that she (knowing whose Minister she is) may above all Things seek thy Honour and Glory; and that we and all her Subjects, (duly considering whose Authority she hath) may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey her, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and Ordinance, through Jesus Christ our Lord; who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever one God, World without End. Amen.



D I S-

DISCOURSE CV.

The Rules and Measures of Alms-giving, and the manifold Advantages of *Charity-Schools*.

LUKE VI. 30.

Give to every Man that asketh of thee.

GIVE to every Man that asketh of thee. But who is there, you will say, sufficient for this? what one Man is there of Ability, to give Relief to all those many that need Relief, to feed all that are hungry, and cloath all that are naked? What Man is there so rich, who, if he should attempt to do this, would not quickly reduce himself to the Condition of those who are most necessitous; and be himself as great an Object of Charity, as any of those had been whom he had relieved?

It is certain therefore, that these Words are not to be understood strictly and literally; but according to Equity, and with reasonable Limitations and Restrictions. And what these Limitations and Restrictions are, and when we may in Reason and Equity be said to discharge this Precept, which, according to the Letter, is manifestly impracticable, it will be my chief Business at this Time to shew.

First then: Some may ask Relief who need it not; nay, who perhaps are in better Condition to give, than those are, of whom they ask an Alms; so that if it were a Christian's Duty to give to every one that asked, *i. e.* to every one that pretended Want; the greedy and covetous, who can never be satisfied with what they have, would soon swallow up all, and the charitable Christian would quickly be sent a begging; and that too among those, whom he would not find so free to part with their Money to him, as he had been to others. These therefore, are plainly not the Askers whom our Lord here means, when he bids us, *Give to every Man that asketh.*

Secondly, Some may ask Relief, who, tho' they need it enough, yet are not worthy to be relieved, being well able to maintain themselves by their own Industry,

Industry, in some honest Labour or Employment; only that they chuse to beg, either because it is the easiest Way of getting a Living; or else perhaps, because they find they can get more by begging, than they could earn by honest working: Such are, for the most part, our wandring Beggars, Travellers, as they commonly call themselves, who have no settled Habitation, but rove about from one Part of the Kingdom to another, perhaps with counterfeit Sores, or Lameness, or with their Bastard, or, it may be, only borrow'd Children, at their Backs, or in their Arms, to move Compassion; begging from some, and stealing from others, as Opportunity best serves, and designing to bring up their Children after them to their own Trade.

But neither are these any of the *Askers* whom our Lord here commands us to give to; *Give to every Man that asketh of thee*: Nay, so far is it from being our Duty to give any Relief to such, that it is expressly forbidden, not only by the Law of the Land, but by the Law of God too; as you may see in 2 *Thess.* iii. 6. *Now we command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Tradition which he received of us*: And what he means by the *disorderly Walker*, he himself explains in the eleventh Verse; *For we hear there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all*. And so far was it from being their Duty to maintain in their Idleness such *disorderly Walkers*, by the Alms of the Church, that on the contrary he tells them, they ought to treat such as excommunicated Persons, and to have no Company or Dealings at all with them; *We command you to withdraw your selves from them*: For so he himself explains that Phrase, at the fourteenth Verse, *Note that Man, and have no Company with him*. And the Command which he gives here, he tells them, at the tenth Verse of that Chapter, was in Persuance of a former Command which he had given in general, concerning all such idle and disorderly Persons: *For when we were with you, says he, this we commanded, That if any Man would not work, neither should he eat*.

The proper Treatment of such *Askers*, or Beggars, as these, is, first to find them Work, the Want of which is the usual Pretence, tho' I believe seldom the true Cause, of their going about begging; and then to force them to work, by hard Fare, and due Correction.

But when the Beggars of both these Sorts are removed out of the Way, both those who do not want, and those who need not want, but thro' their own Fault; there will be still Objects enough left for the Exercise of this Christian Precept, *Give to every Man that asketh of thee*.

For indeed the true and proper Objects of Charity, and of which it is probable there will be always Plenty enough, (for *the Poor*, we are told, *Levit.* xxv. 35. *shall never cease out of the Land*;) are the helpless Poor, i.e. such as cannot maintain themselves. Such are Infants and Children, left poor Orphans by their Parents, and not yet of Age and Strength to be employed in working: Such are those, who by Reason of Age, Lameness, or Sickness, are disabled from working in their Callings, as they have been used to do, and their Hands failing them, have no other Support: Such also are those, who being as diligent and industrious as they can be, to maintain themselves and Families, in those Callings and Employments which they have been brought up to, are not able to earn enough for that Purpose, being either overburthened by a numerous or sick Family, or not able at all Times to get so much Work, as they could, and willingly would go through with. These, I say, and such like, are the Persons that do both most need, and most deserve our Charity; these are those whom the Text speaks of, who ask of us, and to whom, when they ask, it is our Duty to give; *Give to every Man that asketh of thee*. Whoever is truly in Want, and not able to sup-

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port himself, is a proper Object of Charity; and to all that are such, to *every Man that asketh* of us, it is our Duty to give according to our Ability.

I say, *according to our Ability*; for this is certainly another Limitation or Restriction, that must necessarily be put upon this universal Precept of Charity; *Give to every Man that asketh of thee; i. e. do it if thou art able*: For the Design of it could not be to oblige any Man to give beyond his Ability; as the richest Man of all must needs do, if he should relieve every one that was in real Want, even tho' it were by the smallest Alms; but only to engage us, within our Ability, to extend our Charity as far as we can; not to confine it to a few, nor to restrain it to Relations, or Friends, or Country-men, or to such only as are of our own Sect or Persuasion, or to such only as have deserved well of us, or at least have not deserved ill: But whenever we meet with a proper Object of Charity, with one that greatly needs Relief; then, according to our Ability, we must be free in imparting and communicating to him such Things as we have: And to the same Sense the *Apostle* exhorts us, *Gal. vi. 10. As we have Opportunity, let us do Good unto all Men.*

But no one Man is of Ability to do good unto all other Men: No Man has to give to *every one that asketh* of him, *i. e.* to every one that truly needs Relief: And therefore the Precept being so manifestly impracticable in the strict Sense of the Words, *i. e.* if it be understood as laying an Obligation upon every individual Man, to supply the Wants of every other Man that is in Need; it ought, I think, to be understood rather as given to *all in Conjunction, to the whole Society of Christians, to the Company of Christ's Disciples*: That the Care of the Poor should be a common Care, lying upon them all; and as obliging every one to contribute his Part or Proportion towards it. *Give to every Man that asketh: i. e.* Let every one that is in Want be relieved; let none be suffered to perish for Need: And in Order to this, let all that have any Thing more than they are bound to use upon themselves, devote so much of what they have to charitable Uses, that out of that Stock or Fund of Charity, which is raised by the Contribution of all that are able to give any Thing, there may be sufficient to supply all the reasonable Necessities of all that are in Want.

Or else, if the Precept be understood, as given to single and individual Persons; the best Method, as I suppose, and I think the only one, of practising this Advice, is, by every Man's allotting a certain Portion of his own Income to charitable Uses, and bestowing the same among those Poor, who are of his own Neighbourhood or Acquaintance; leaving others, because it is not in his single Power to relieve all that need; leaving others, I say, whose Wants he is not so well acquainted with, or who, tho' they may have Reason to ask, yet have not so near a Claim to his Charity, to be relieved in like manner by others, who know their Needs better than he does; and who, by Reason of their Neighbourhood, or Relation, or Acquaintance, are more strictly obliged to provide for, and supply their Wants, than he is.

And if now it be asked, *who* they are that are thus obliged, according to their Ability, to contribute towards the Relief of the Poor and Needy? And, *how much* every one is to give towards it?

To the first, the Answer is easy: *He that hath two Coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath Meat, let him do likewise,* says St. *John Baptist*, *Luke iii. 11.* And, *Whoso hath this World's Goods, and seeth his Brother have Need, and shutteth up his Bowels of Compassion from him, how dwelleth the Love of God in him?* says another St. *John*, the *Apostle* of our Lord, *1 Epist. iii. 17.* By which it plainly appears, that every one that has any Thing more than he must needs use himself, *he that hath two Coats*, and has Need to wear but one of them, as well as he that

has Abundance of Superfluities, is to give thereof, for the Relief of those that have nothing, or not enough.

It is a great Mistake therefore of some, who, to excuse themselves, would lay the whole Burthen of keeping the Poor upon the Rich, as better able, in their Opinion, to bear the whole, than they are to bear any part of it. And by the same Reason, they might lay the whole Burden of Taxes, and of all other publick Charges, upon them too.

But the Truth is, there is no Reason at all, either for the one, or the other of these. For it is agreeable to the Will of God, that there should be great Variety and Disparity in Men's Conditions; that some should be high, and others low; that some should be richer, and others poorer: According to a Man's Station and Condition in the World, such must his Expences be; he must keep a better Table, he must be attended in better Manner, he must bring up his Children after another Way; and according to the Rate of their Education, he must provide for them a larger Portion, than a poorer Man needs to do: So that to them who are of higher Quality, and better Condition in the World, there are plainly more Things that may truly be reckoned necessary, than there are to others that are in a meaner Station; the Charges of which being defrayed, the rich Man may have no more Superfluity, no more that he can spare from himself, than a poorer Man: I do not mean, that he may not spare a greater Sum in it self; but I mean, not a greater Sum in proportion to his Estate and Quality, than a poorer Man, in proportion likewise to his Estate and Condition in the World, may spare to give away, with as little Inconvenience to himself and his Family. The Man that is in mean or moderate Circumstances, cannot indeed give a Pound to charitable Uses, so well as a rich Man may do; but he may give away a Shilling with as little Miss of it, with as little Abatement in his Way of living, and with as little Inconvenience to himself and Family, in all other Respects, as he that has twenty times his Estate or Income, can give away twenty times as much. And whoever has any Thing to spare, any Thing that he is not forced by mere Necessity to use and employ upon himself, and those that depend upon him for their Subsistence, is bound, out of that Superfluity, be it little or much, to give somewhat towards the Support of those, who have nothing else to support them, but the Charity of others. Even he that was once a Thief to supply his own Wants, is bound to labour with his Hands, to help to comfort those who have not Hands to work for themselves, as well as for Necessaries for his own Use: For so the *Apostle* teaches, *Eph. iv. 28. Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.* And therefore it is a good Rule of Charity, tho' it be taken out of an *Apocryphal Book*, that was given by *Tobit*, to his Son *Tobias*, *Tob. iv. 8. If thou hast Abundance, give Alms accordingly: If thou hast but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little; for thereby thou layest up a good Treasure for thy self against the Day of Necessity.*

But the other Question afore-mentioned, namely, *how much* every Man that is able to give any Thing, ought to give towards the Maintenance of the Poor and Helpless, is a Question not so easy to be resolved; because the right Resolution of it depends upon the Consideration of several Circumstances, which are various and mutable, and hardly ever twice alike.

For it may be, that at some Times there may be but *few* Poor, and then a small Contribution from all such as are able to give, may be sufficient for their Support: And at other Times, it may be, (as it was in the primitive Church, at the first preaching of Christianity by the *Apostles*,) that the Multitude of the helpless Poor may be so great, that the whole annual Income or Increase of the Rich, may not be sufficient to maintain both themselves

and the Poor; but it may be necessary to follow that Example that was set by the first Converts to Christianity; of whom it is said, *Acts iv. 34, 35. As many as were Possessors of Lands or Houses, sold them, and brought the Price of the Things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles Feet; and Distribution was made unto every Man, according as he had need.*

And again: Though it has been said already, and may be truly said in general, that one Man is able to give away as much as another, *i. e.* not in Quantity but in Proportion; that one may give a tenth, a twentieth, a thirtieth, or any other Part of his Income or Increase, as well as another Man that has a greater Income, can give away the same Proportion of that; yet this Saying is liable to some Exceptions: For it may be, that of two Men who had the same Sort of Education, who were bred up in the same Way of living, who are of just the same Station and Degree in the World, and who have exactly the same Comings in; one may have none to keep but himself, and none to provide for after he himself is dead; and the other may have a great Charge of Children both to maintain and to provide for: And when there is such a great Difference in the Circumstances of those, who may be reckoned to have the same Estate, it cannot be expected that he that has so many more necessary Occasions of his own, both of spending and of laying up, than the other has, should be able to spare so much in quantity, or even in proportion to his Income, as the other may do, for charitable Uses.

Moreover, it may be also considered; that a Burthen that would be very light to all, if every one would bear his Proportion of it, may become exceeding heavy to some, if others, especially if many others, withdraw their Shoulders from it. And this Difference there is also in this Case, between some Times and others: Sometimes there has been a Spirit of Charity visible among Christian People, a Zeal of good Works, a holy Emulation or Striving to out-do each other in well-doing: So it was in the Primitive Church; their Love was sincere, and their Charity fervent; none was then for shifting off the Burthen from himself to others; but every one rather strove to bear as much of it himself as he could, and to give all the Ease that might be to others. But at other Times it may be quite otherwise: Our Saviour himself foretels, *Matth. xxiv. 12.* that some Time before his second Coming, *Iniquity shall abound, and the Charity of many shall wax cold:* And St. Paul speaking of the same Time, says, *2 Tim. iii. 2.* that then *Men shall be covetous, and Lovers of themselves.* And when it is thus, when a great many of those who ought freely to contribute their Proportion towards defraying the common Charge of the helpless Poor, are so far from that, so far from giving any Thing that they can keep, that they will hardly pay even what they are assessed by Law to a Poor-Rate, till they are in Danger of being distrained upon for it; and what they are so compelled to pay, comes from them like so much of their Heart's Blood: It must needs be, I say, that then the Burthen must lie heavier upon those that are charitably and well disposed; and that the same Proportion of their Income or Increase, which at another Time, if all were willing to bear their Share of the Charge, would be more than sufficient for the Relief of all that are in Want, may not then be near enough for that Purpose; but it may be necessary then for such as are of charitable Minds, to be willing of themselves, to give *not only to their Power, but even beyond their Power,* as the Apostle speaks, *2 Cor. viii. 3.* it may be needful then for such to allot a much larger Share of all their worldly Goods to charitable Uses, than in better Times it would be requisite to do.

So that all the Answer that I suppose can be given to this Question; *how much* every Man ought to give to those that ask or need Relief? Or, *how much*

much every Man ought to set apart and appropriate to the Uses of Charity? must be in some general Rule; such as these:

1. All that ask must have; *Give to every Man that asketh of thee*; i. e. as I have already explained that Phrase. All that ask with Reason, or all that have Reason to ask, though perhaps they may be ashamed to beg: All that are really in Want, and not able by honest Diligence, in a lawful Way, to supply their own Wants, must be relieved so far as their own Labour is insufficient; or must be supported altogether, if they are not able to Labour at all, by the Alms and Charity of others: But not of one single Man; for no one Man is sufficient thus to relieve or support all that Need; but by the joint Charity and Contribution of all that can spare any Thing from themselves: and the less Care there is taken for a sufficient Supply of the Wants of such needy and helpless Persons by a Poor-Rate; the more Care must be taken of them by a private Distribution of Charity; and the fewer there are that will be persuaded to give freely, the more free and generous in their Gifts must they be, who are persuaded that Alms-giving is a necessary Duty without which, they cannot be just before God; and for the liberal Exercise whercof, they shall be greatly rewarded.

For it is certain, that no Man was sent into this World to be starved; but every one that is born into the World, if he be able to labour, hath a Right to be maintained by his Labour; and every one that cannot Work, has a Right to be maintained without working; and there is, in that ample Plenty and Provision which God has made for all his Creatures, a sufficient Portion, that is truly the poor helpless Man's; and which, though he cannot lawfully take to himself by Force or Fraud, from others who are possessed thereof; yet they, on the other Side, who are possessed of it, cannot withhold or detain from him without manifest Injustice on their Side; according to that Saying of the wise Man, Prov. iii. 27. *With-hold not good from them to whom it is due*. So that whoever has more of this World's Goods than he has Need of for his own Use, is for the Residue or Overplus only a Trustee for the Poor; and he is not a righteous Man, he is false to his Trust, and unjust in his Stewardship, if he detains their Portion from them.

2. Another general Rule, as to the Measure and Proportion of what every Man should lay aside, for the Use of the helpless Poor, may be gathered from those Words of the Apostle, in 1 Cor. xvi. 2. *Let every one of you lay by him in Store as God has prospered him*: Like to which is that of the Son of Syrach; Eccles. xxxv. 10. *Give unto the most High, according as he hath enriched thee, and as thou hast gotten*. The Meaning is, that every Man, whether his Gains are much or little, provided they be but any Thing more than in a frugal Way of living, according to his Station in the World, he is obliged to expend, to maintain himself and Family; ought to lay aside at least a considerable part, if not the whole, of what he can so spare, to bestow, as there is Occasion, and as Opportunity offers, for the Relief of the helpless Poor.

I say, First, What a Man can spare from himself in a frugal Way of living, according to his Degree and Station in the World: For there is no Question, but that they on whom God has bestowed a large Share of worldly Goods, are allowed by him to live after another Manner, in greater Plenty and Grandeur, than a Poor Man can do; and in so living, they do truly spend the Bulk of their Estates as they ought to do, and exercise a truer Charity to the Poor, than they would do if they should fare hardly, and live sordidly, and meanly, very much below their Condition, and then give away all that they so saved to the Poor. For in living some Way answerably to their Estate and Condition, they are helpful to the working and industrious Poor, whom by this Means they find with honest Employment; and

and to a Man that is able to work, it is a much better Charity to maintain him in Work, than it would be to maintain him in Idleness. Only then they must remember, that as there are some Poor that can work, and whom they therefore do well to keep in Work; so there are other Poor that cannot work, and so must be maintained by Alms and free Gifts.

And for this Reason it is also necessary (as I hinted before) that even they that have the greatest Incomes, and who may and ought to live in a Manner suitable thereto, should yet be *frugal* in their Way of living, and careful not to out-spend themselves; nor indeed to spend so much, but that they may have somewhat left, somewhat that is proportional to the greatness of their Estate and Income, to bestow for the Relief and Support of this other Sort of Poor, which can do nothing of Work, or not enough Work to earn their living by.

And therefore if there be any (and there are indeed too many such) that having good Estates, do out-spend themselves in high living, or lose what they have by Carelessness, or waste it in Profuseness or Gaming; so that though they give little or nothing away to the Poor, yet they are so far from having any Thing to spare, that they are rather continually running into Debt: These, I say, must not think to excuse themselves from their Want of Charity and Alms-giving, by saying (altho' they can say it truly) that they have nothing to give away; that all they have, is scarcely enough for their own Use; and that if they had as much more than they have, they could very well employ it upon themselves: For tho' their Case be indeed such as they represent it, yet it is their own Fault only that it is so; and one Fault will not serve to excuse another. For if even they that have nothing of their own, but only Hands to work with, are yet obliged to *work with those Hands*, that they *may have to give to him that needeth*, as the *Apostle* teaches in a Place already cited; much more, certainly, are they, who are blessed by God with a large and plentiful Estate, so that they have no need to work, obliged to be so frugal and husbandly in the spending it, as that, after their own Occasions are served, there may be a good part of it left, to bestow in Alms, for the Support of the Poor and Helpless.

And this Overplus, this, be it more or less, that any Man can spare from himself in a sober and frugal Way of living, answerable to his Estate and Degree, is either in whole or in part the Poor's Portion.

Sometimes, I say, it is so only *in part*; as namely,

First, When a Man's Income is raised only by a Trade, or Profession, or Employment, which in Time to come may decline, wear off, or quite fail; or for the Management whereof, a Man may in time to come, be rendered altogether unfit, by Sickness, Old-age, decay of Strength or Senses, and the like. For in this Case he is not a wise Man, but is sent by *Solomon* to the *Ant* to learn Wisdom, *Prov. vi. 6.* who is not both so diligent and industrious in his Business while it lasts; as also so frugal in the ordering of his Expences, as to lay up somewhat, besides what it is reasonable for him to allot to charitable Uses; somewhat, I say, besides for himself, in a wise Provision against these not improbable, not uncommon Accidents.

Secondly, Some part only, and not the whole, of what a Man can so spare from his necessary present Expences, may be reckoned the Poor's Portion, in Case he has some, and especially if he has many that depend upon him, not only for a present Maintenance, but likewise for the Means and Foundation of a future Subsistence after his Death. For in this Case it is but reasonable, that he should so lessen his Way of living, as to lay up more than otherwise he needed to do; that so, neither his Children may be brought up in an higher Way of living, than they will probably be able to maintain themselves in afterwards; nor want a sufficient Stock, by the wise

and diligent Management whereof, they may be able to keep themselves in as good Fashion as they have been brought up in.

But unless it be in these Cases, I think *the whole* of what a Man can spare from himself, in such a frugal Way of living as is answerable to his Estate and Quality, may well be reckoned a Portion belonging to the helpless Poor, and to be in some Measure misapplied, if any Part of it be given from them so long as there are Poor enough of that Sort to give it to; which it is probable there always will be.

For if a Man's yearly Income be raised by the Fruits and Profits of an Estate; of such an Estate, I mean, as is not wasting and perishable, or for a Term of Years, but permanent and of Inheritance; and if his yearly Income arising thereby, be more than he has, or probably ever will have, a reasonable Occasion to spend upon himself; and if he has no Children to provide Portions for, either in his Life-time, or after his Decease: To what Purpose should this Man continually save and lay up, and increase his Store? Or what Reason can he give for his so doing, which will not imply in it, either an unreasonable and irreligious Distrust of God's Providence, or else an inordinate Love of Riches? And certainly he may very well apply the whole of this Overplus, to the Use of the helpless Poor, to the feeding the Hungry, and cloathing the Naked, or to some other Works of Piety or publick Charity, when he has plainly no Reason to apply any Part of it to any other Use: He may well give it to the Poor, when he has none else to give it to.

Thirdly, Another general Direction, as to the Quantity and Proportion, that it is reasonable for every Man to lay aside out of his Income for the Use of the poor and helpless, may be taken from the Reason and Equity of that Law which was given to the *Jews* concerning this very Matter; which being a Law given to *all*, to them that had little coming in, as well as to those that had much, and to them that had a great Charge of their own to maintain, as well as to those that had fewer and smaller Occasions of Expence, may reasonably be thought to have laid no greater Burthen upon any than what might well be born by all, and to have enjoined the laying aside no greater a Proportion of every Man's Income or Increase for charitable Uses, than what might well enough be spared, even by those who had the least coming in, and the most Charge of their own to keep; which Proportion therefore they that had greater Estates, and were not burthened with so large a Family of their own, might in Reason and Equity (though they were not by the Letter of the Law) be thought bound to exceed.

The Law which I mean, and now refer to, you may see in *Deut. xvi. 28, 29. At the End of three Years thou shalt bring forth all the Tithes of thine Increase the same Year, and shalt lay it up within thy Gates: And the Levite, and the Stranger, and the Fatherless, and the Widow which are within thy Gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the Work of thine Hand which thou doest.*

Now though it must be confessed, that this, as it was a Law given to the *Jews*, does not oblige *Christians*; yet as it was a Law grounded on Equity and Reason, we may from hence fairly argue and collect (as the *Apostle St. Paul* frequently does, even from the ceremonial Parts of the Law of *Moses*) what is the Duty of *Christians* in the like Case. For,

First, If so much as this, equivalent to a thirtieth Part of every Man's Crop; that is, to be sure, a great deal more than a twentieth, not much less perhaps than a tenth Part, of every Man's yearly Gain or Increase (besides several other Charities else-where prescribed by the *Levitical Law*) was due to the Poor, such a Due as could not be withholden from them without In-

justice; if without allotting at least thus much to charitable Uses, a Man could not be justified as a *righteous Man*, by the *Jewish Law*; it was necessary, that in Order to be accounted by God a *merciful* or *charitable Man*, he should give more to charitable Uses, than he was strictly commanded to do by this Law. And,

Secondly, It may be farther argued from hence, that seeing *our Righteousness* must exceed the *Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, not only the Righteousness which they practised, but the Righteousness which they were taught to practise by the Law of *Moses*; a *Christian* can hardly have a good Assurance towards God, and be justified in his own Conscience, if his Righteousness in this Particular comes short of theirs: A *Christian's Charity* certainly should not be less than a *Jew's Righteousness*.

But after all, seeing in the *New Testament*, which is the Law of *Christians*, there is not any Thing particularly prescribed and commanded, as to the Quantity or Proportion which every Man ought to give to those that ask; I shall not take upon me to prescribe or direct any Thing more in this Matter. For that is true Charity, whether it be little or much, that a Man gives freely, and with a chearful Mind, and out of Obedience to God, and a tender Commiseration of the Wants and Necessities of others.

This Matter therefore is, in great Measure, left to be judged of by our selves, after due Consideration had both of the Number of proper Objects, the Pressingness of their Wants, what Provision is otherwise made for them, and what is a competent Relief; and likewise of the Obligations we are under to those of our own Family and Household.

And tho' in any Case almost that can be put, howsoever circumstantiated, it may be easy to say, what is manifestly a Deficiency in Charity, *viz.* when a Man that is well able to give away a good deal, gives away very little, a Trifle, next to Nothing, not so much, it may be, as he allows himself to spend, and does spend every Year, without grudging, and without any Mifs of it, upon mere Vanities and Superfluities: And tho' it be alike easy to say, on the other Side, what is manifestly an Excess or Profuseness in Charity, *viz.* when a Man, without any Regard to those whom Nature and near Relation has made the more peculiar Objects of his Care and Kindness, gives away to Strangers all that he can spare from his own proper Use, or all that he does not spend upon his own self; to the utter Disappointment of the just and reasonable Expectations of his own Family and Household: Though, I say, it may be thus in most Cases easy enough to say, what is manifestly a Defect, and what is manifestly an Excess in Alms-giving, yet in the Medium between these two Extremes, in which the Virtue of Charity or Alms-giving does lie, there may be great Latitude; and of two Persons in exactly the same Circumstances, one may give more, and for his greater Liberality may deserve to be highly commended; and yet the other, who gives less, may not be justly liable to Blame. And therefore all that the *Apostle* himself thought fit to prescribe in the Case was this, 2 Cor. ix. 7. *Every Man according as he purposeth in his Heart, every Man as God hath prospered him, so let him give.*

But nevertheless, tho' it be thus in great Measure left to every Man's own Conscience, to judge how much, or what part of his Gains or Income it is fit he should appropriate to, or bestow in charitable Uses; it highly concerns us all to judge fairly concerning this Matter; because whatever we judge concerning it, God will judge over again; and it is his Judgment, not our own, by which we must stand or fall for ever.

And while we are judging of this, it should likewise be seriously thought of by us, that tho' a lesser Charity may be graciously accepted, it will not be so highly rewarded as a greater Charity will be; for, *he*, says the *Apostle*,
2 Cor.

2 Cor. ix. 6. *which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully.*

And now, tho' I fear I have already detained you too long, I nevertheless beg your farther Patience, while I briefly apply what has been said, to a particular Occasion: And it is this.

There are a great many poor People, who by their diligent working are able to provide themselves and their Families just with the Necessaries of Life; Meat, Drink, and Cloaths; for which Reason they are not proper to be entred upon the List of such as are to be kept by a Poor-Rate; because that is designed only for those who by Reason either of Infancy, or Age, or Sicknefs, or other Disability, cannot work at all, or by all the Work they can do, cannot earn enough for their Support: Many such, I say, there are, who by their Labour can make a Shift to find themselves and their Families with mere Necessaries; but that is all they can do: They have nothing to spare, to lay out for the Education of their Children, nor are they able to instruct them themselves; nor, if they were, have they any Time to spare from their necessary Labours, to do it in. The Consequence of which is, that these Children, thus left to themselves, do commonly spend their whole Time in Play and Idleness, and quickly learn of one another to lie, and swear, and pilfer, and to speak prophanely and obscenely, and all other Vices which in that Age they are capable of learning: And when they grow up to be older, having never been instructed in Religion, nor, it may be, so much as taught to read in the Bible, they make no Conscience how they behave themselves, either in Services, or any other Employment that they are put to; very often will take to no honest Business at all, are not only not useful, but very often hurtful, in their Generation, and pass away their Manhood, and their old Age too, if they live to it, in the same gross Ignorance that they did their Childhood, receiving no Benefit at all from their being born in a Christian Country, but only the bare Name of Christian.

To prevent therefore the manifold Mischiefs arising from a Want of religious Education, and to give Hope that the next Generation may prove better than the present; a great many pious and well-disposed Persons have lately taken in hand to procure Contributions for the setting up Charity Schools, for the virtuous and christian Education of the Children of the Poor: In which Schools the poor Children are taught to read, and write, and work; and are carefully instructed, out of the Church Catechism, and other good Books, in the Principles of the Christian Faith and Practice. And in some of these Schools, where the Contributions are sufficient, the poor Children are decently, but plainly clothed: All which Care is taken about them, they behaving themselves orderly, till they are fit to be put out to Services, or Apprenticeships, or to some Employment whereby they may earn their own Living. And such Progress has been made in this good Work, by God's Blessing upon the Charity and Zeal of those who have undertaken it, that in a very few Years last past, (for it is but a few Years since the Design first began) most of the considerable Towns in *England* and *Wales*, have already such Charity Schools erected in them: And there is hardly a County in *England*, in which there are not several of these Schools set up, as you may see in the printed Account of them, except the two Counties of *Devonshire* and *Cornwall*; in which I cannot find that the Work is yet so much as begun. But I trust we shall not lye much longer under this Reproach: Nay, I hope that as we have been hitherto more backward in this good Work, than any other Part of the Nation; so we shall now be more zealous in it than any of them, and by our Speed and Diligence therein, make some Amends for our having so long neglected it.

To this End, I have already recommended it to most of the considerable Towns within this Diocese, which I hope will have good Effect: And now I do the same to you, the Governors and Members of this capital City; who, I hope, will think it your Honour, as I am sure it is your Duty, to give a good Example, in every Thing that is praise-worthy, to other Places of lesser Note in the Diocese.

Hoping therefore, that by what was said in the foregoing Discourse, you are fully convinced that it is your Duty, to devote to, and lay aside for, charitable Uses, a good Portion out of your annual Income or Increase: What I have farther to do, and for which I beg your Patience a little longer, is only to represent to you, what an excellent Charity this is, which I now propose to you, and consequently how very reasonable it is, that some Part of the Money so devoted to, and laid by for, pious and charitable Uses, should be bestowed this Way.

And this will appear by considering, 1. The Persons who are the Objects of this Charity: And, 2. The Nature of that Relief that is hereby afforded to them.

1. By considering the Persons who are the Objects of this Charity, who are, without all Dispute, very proper Objects of Charity. For rarely, if ever, in Scripture, are the Objects of Charity reckoned up, but the *Fatherless* are particularly mentioned: And *Fatherless* they may well be accounted, not only who are left Orphans by their Parents, but likewise they, whose Parents, tho' living, yet being in some Measure disabled from working, either by Age or Sickness, or over-burthened by a numerous Family, are not able to do the Office of Fathers to them, hardly to provide them with Necessaries, much less to spare any Thing for their Education.

In other Objects to whom we extend our Charity, we may easily be mistaken, and we are doubtless very often mistaken in them. Every Day almost makes fresh Discoveries of such as have robbed the truly Poor, and taken the Bread, as it were, out of their Mouths, by pretending Sickness, Sores, Lameness, or Want of Work; or by carrying about counterfeit Certificates of Shipwreck, Fire, Inundation, or other highly pitiable, because merely providential, Losses or Misfortunes. But in applying our Charity this Way, we go upon the surest Grounds; here we may be more confident that we are not imposed upon, as to the Objects to whom we extend our Kindness: For, however they that come, or pretend to come, to us from a-far off, may put upon us by forged Certificates, or by telling their own sad and lamentable Story with such Life and Passion, that being not able to contradict it, we cannot forbear believing it: Here we are subject to no such Cheat, because we know the State of our own Neighbours better, or we can with Ease inform our selves, whether they are lazy or industrious, orderly or extravagant; whether they have few Children or many; and whether or no, what they may fairly be supposed able to gain by their honest Labour, be sufficient to support and educate them.

And particularly, as to those who are the most immediate Objects of this Charity, *viz.* the Children themselves, we may be still more certain that we are not cheated. A strong Man may, by some Art that may be used, appear to be weak and sickly; or a sound Person may, by counterfeit Lameness, or by Sores made and kept open on purpose, appear to us unable to work; but a grown Man or Woman, can by no Art that can be used, be made to appear to us in the Form of a Child: And if we see with our own Eyes that it is a Child, we may be sure that it wants Instruction; and consequently, that if his Parents either can not, or do not make Provision for this Child; to provide for it other Ways, is a most needful and seasonable Kindness. But,

2. If we consider the Design of these Charity Schools, and the Kindness that is thereby meant to be done to such poor Children, the Excellency and Usefulness of this Expression of our Charity to them, will thence farther appear.

Now, (1.) one Design of these Charity Schools, is to keep such poor Children from Idleness, the Mother of all Sin; to take them out of the Way of Temptation, and to inure them to Business, such as in that tender Age they are capable of; the blessed Consequence of which is like to be, that when they shall be grown up, they will have no Desire or Inclination to live idly, but will readily betake themselves to the Exercise of such honest Employments as they shall be brought up to.

So that what Money is laid out this Way, is laid out to the most Advantage, both to them on whom it is laid out, and to the Publick.

First to them on whom it is laid out: For is it not plainly for the Advantage of a poor Man, to have a constant Pension given him, rather than only a Meal's Meat? Is it not plainly a greater Kindness to support him during his whole Life, than only for a short Time? But now that is what in Effect this Method of Charity does to the poor Children whom it relieves: It does in Effect settle upon them a perpetual Pension or Annuity; and that too without more Charge than it would have been to have given them only a present Relief. Nay indeed that Ability which this Sort of Education gives them to maintain themselves ever after by their own Labour, is a much truer Kindness to them, than it would be to settle upon them a Pension or Annuity, on which they might live ever after in Ease and Idleness.

In this respect also, what Money is laid out this Way, is laid out to very great Advantage to the Publick: For by this Means, many are brought up to honest Trades and Employments, and are thereby made useful Members of the Society, who would otherwise, very probably, have been the Plagues of it; who having passed their Childhood and first Youth in Idleness, in playing and loitering about, would never after have been disposed, or well able, to take to Business; and who having then learned to lye, and cheat, and pilfer, would have improved continually in those Vices, as they had done in Years, until they had been cut off, it may be, before the Middle of their Days, by the Executioner of publick Justice. But,

(2.) Another, indeed the main, the most direct and immediate Design of these Charity Schools, is to instruct those poor Children that are taken into them, in the Principles of the Christian Religion: In order to which, they are not only taught to read, but carefully instructed in the Church Catechism; the Answers in which, they are not only taught to repeat, but also made to understand: They are besides, kept constantly to their Prayers, made duly to frequent the Church, and have their whole Behaviour narrowly observed, in Order to check the first Appearances of Sin in them, by proper Reproof or Correction.

And in this Respect, the Charity Money employed to this Use, is certainly bestowed to good Purpose; indeed to the best Purpose that such Money could be laid out.

For by other common Expressions of Charity, we yield Relief only to the Bodies of Men, either putting them into a Capacity of maintaining themselves and Families by their own Labour, or supplying to them out of our Abundance, those Necessaries of Life, which their own honest Industry was not sufficient to procure: But by this we help to put them into the best Capacity of providing for another and better Life: By this we help to teach them the most useful Art, that of living; and the most gainful Trade, that of laying up Treasures in Heaven, which will never fail them.

Besides: Other Instances of Charity commonly terminate in those Objects to whom immediately we express our Kindness. Thus, when we give Bread to the Hungry, or Drink to the Thirsty, or cover the naked with a Garment, we afford indeed most seasonable Relief and Comfort to our poor Neighbour himself, who is in great Distress: But the Benefit reaches no farther, unless it be accidentally, than to his own Person; and that too but for a short Time: Whereas what we bestow in the good Education of the Children of the Poor, and in well-seasoning them at first with the Principles of the true Religion, is of more universal and lasting Benefit: It does them good not only for the present, but for all their Lives after; according to that Observation of the *wise Man*, *Prov. xx. 6. Train up a Child in the Way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* And the good Instructions which they receive in their early Years, and which, it is to be hoped, they will retain and be influenced by as long as they live, are a Benefit, not only to themselves, but to the whole World besides; for they make them better and more useful in every Relation, than they would otherwise be. And the Benefit thereof reaches likewise beyond their own Times; it may reach to many Generations, and it is to be hoped it will: For none but such as are very ignorant themselves, can endure that their Children should be bred up in Ignorance. So that they who shall be sensible of the great Benefit which they themselves received from the Charity of others, by being taught to read and write, and instructed early in the Grounds of Religion, will labour and strain hard, rather than their own Children should be without the same Benefit: And, if they be good Men (and there is no Means more likely to make them such, than a good Education) they will both know it to be a Part of their Duty, and not suffer themselves in the Neglect of it, to bring up their own Children in the Fear of God, and in the Knowledge of their Duty; according to the good Example of *Abraham* the Father of the Faithful; of whom God himself gives this Testimony, *Gen. xviii. 19. I know him, that he will command his Children and his Household after him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgment.*

The manifold Excellency and Usefulness of this Exercise and Expression of Charity being therefore so manifest, I shall add nothing more to persuade you to it.

I shall only pray God, *who is able to make all Grace abound, that ye always, having all Sufficiency in all Things, may abound to every good Work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, &c.*



The Lord Bishop of *Exeter's* Letter to the Clergy of his Diocese.

Good BROTHER,



HEARTILY recommend to you the Perusal of Dr. Moss's excellent Sermon herewith sent to you, and of the Account of the Charity-Schools in England and Wales thereto annexed. By the former you will see, what I doubt not but you are already sufficiently persuaded of, the great Piety, and the manifold Advantages of setting up such Schools; and by the latter, what a good Disposition there is in the whole Nation to so good a Work; the best appearing Ground of Hope, I think, we have of the Continuance of God's Favour towards us.

It was a Matter both of Wonder and Concern to me, to observe, that in the said Account of the Charity-Schools, there is not so much as one Place noted in the whole Diocese of Exeter, wherein any such School hath been yet erected; it will be our Part therefore now, by a greater Zeal for this Work of Piety and Charity, to make some Amends for our Backwardness therein.

In order to which, I earnestly recommend it to you, to communicate the Contents of the aforementioned Sermon and Account, and likewise of this Letter, to such of your neighbouring Gentry and Clergy, as you have Reason to hope will be ready to further such a pious Design; and if you can procure any Gifts, or annual Subscriptions towards it, then, upon Consultation with them, to set up, with all the Speed that may be, some School or Schools of this Kind, in such Place or Places within your Neighbourhood, as shall be thought most convenient.

And let not, I beseech you, the Smallness of the first Gifts or Subscriptions be any Discouragement to you, from beginning this Work: For those Schools, of this Sort, in other Parts of the Kingdom, which are now the most flourishing, had at first but a slender Beginning; and when the Work is once begun, it will quickly recommend it self, and the Charity of a few, will, I doubt not, provoke very many.

My Stay in the Country now will be very short, so that I cannot expect, before I go to Parliament, to see any Progress made in this Work; but I hope, when I shall make a Visitation throughout the Diocese, which, God willing, I design to do next Summer, to find it in a good Forwardness. And being persuaded, that you cannot any Way do better Service to God and Religion, than by encouraging this Work of Charity, I must own, that I shall have the best Opinion of those of my Clergy, whom I shall find to have been the most forward to promote it.

I heartily commend you, and your Labours, to the Blessing of God, and remain,

Your loving Friend and Brother,

Exon. Sept. 4.
1708.

O F S P. E X O N.

A N

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The Lord Bishop of Exeter's Letter to
the Clergy of his Diocese.

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1. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the results of the study conducted by the research team. The study was designed to investigate the effects of the proposed intervention on the target population. The results indicate that the intervention had a significant positive impact on the outcome measures, suggesting that the proposed intervention is effective in addressing the research objectives. The findings are discussed in detail, and the implications for practice and future research are highlighted. The report concludes with a summary of the key findings and a recommendation for further research.

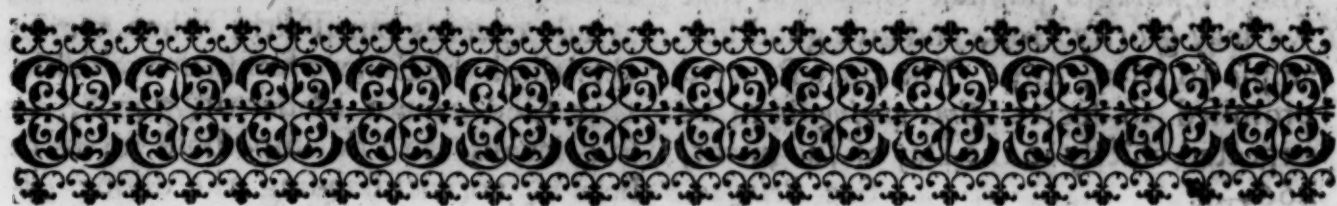
...the Country was still in my hands. To that I cannot except.
...I go to England, to be my agent in this House; but I feel
...I shall make a Vindication throughout the House, which, God willing,
...to do it. I cannot, to that is a good opportunity. And being
...that you cannot say I have done better service to God and Religion,
...in encouraging this House of Commons. I will say, that I shall have the
...of those of my Country, whom I shall find to have been the most

to the King of God, and

Your loving Friend and Brother,

OXFORD

TRA



An Alphabetical
I N D E X
OF THE
Principal Matters contained in the
Two VOLUMES.

The Reader is desired to take Notice, that when any Figures are joined by a Rule —, the same Subject continues to be treated of, from the former to the latter Page so connected.

A.

ABUSE, The possibility of a thing being *abused* no argument against the use of it, 1115,6. 1169.

ACTION, What required to make one morally good, 451,2. Hopes and fears the Springs of *Action*, 958.

ADORNING the Doctrine of Christ, what, and how necessary, 162—8. See *Light*.

ADULTERY, How far forbidden the Jews by their Law, 266. What farther Prohibition was added to it by our Saviour 266—71. The Reasonableness of that Addition, 271—4. Tho' it may seem a greater Restraint, yet our Obedience even to the old Law is render'd more easy by it, 274.

ADVERSITIES. See *Afflictions*.

AFFLICTIONS. See *Sufferings of good Men*.

AFFLICTIONS in some measure the Lot of all good Men, 24,5. *Afflictions* do not make Men blessed simply of themselves, 25. See *Mourners*. Some Assurance of God's Love necessary to support us under *Afflictions*, 31,2. *Afflictions* well

supported by the Consideration that God, who orders them, is our all-wise and all merciful Father, 836,7. See *Gifts of God*. Grievous *Afflictions* overthrow the Hope of the Hypocrite, but settle and confirm that of the good Christian, 927—9.

ALMS, take heed that ye do not your *Alms*, &c. should rather be read, take heed that ye do not your *Righteousness*, &c. 447—9.

ALMS-GIVING. See *Poor*, *Charity*.

ALMS-GIVING, in some prosperous Circumstances, almost the only Duty whereby a Man can exercise and prove his Sincerity towards God, and Confidence in him, 459—61. Not to be performed purely for the Applause of Men, 462. This Duty not to be practis'd, nor omitted, merely for the sake of publick view, *ibid*. Our *Alms-giving*, when done in private, not to be published, *ibid*. Most unprofitable, when done for the praise of Men, 463. Which is a Reward most vain and worthless, *ibid*. Especially as it deprives us of the Praise and Rewards of God, 463—4. Our Lord commands us to give *Alms* in private, to prove our Sincerity,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

cerity, and secure our Reward, 464,5. And encourages publick Charities, that we may glorify God, and give good Example to Men, 465. The open Reward promised to secret *Alms-giving* is to be expected chiefly in the Day of Judgment, 466—7. See *Religion*.

ALTAR, to bring a Gift to the *Altar*, What, 232,3

AMEN is an Hebrew Word, signifying *truly, verily, &c.* 618,9. At the end of a Discourse or Sentence it repeats or affirms what had been said before, 619,20. At the end of a Prayer, it expresses a Desire that the Prayer may, and a Hope that it will, be granted, 620,1. And is a Repetition of the private Prayer of a single Person, *ibid.* Our Lord requiring us to say *Amen* at the end of Prayer, teaches us that all publick Prayer ought to be express'd in a Language and Style which may easily be understood by all who are to join it, 621,2. And that we should mind what is said, *ibid.*

AND in Scripture often put for *or*, 188

ANGELS, not to be prayed to, 503,4

ANGER, Persons slow to *Anger* not the Poor in Spirit, 8

ANGER, the Torments attending it, 45,6

ANGER and its Degrees, 43,5. Blameable when we are angry at all, and ought not; and this specified in four Cases, 45—8. Blameable when we are sooner angry, 48,9. When we are more angry, 49. And when we are longer angry than is reasonable, 49,50. What *Anger* reasonable and innocent, 226,7. What *Anger* faulty and inexcusable, 227,8. Malicious *Anger*, and reproachful and scornful Language, forbidden by Christ under a greater Penalty than the Law appointed for Murder itself, 224

ANGRY without a Cause, What, 225—8

ANOINT thy Head, and wash thy Face, 636,7. See *Fasting*.

ANXIETY. See *Bread, Thought, Care*. The Torment, Absurdity, and Unreasonableness of *Anxiety*, 685,6. What *Anxiety* for the things of the Morrow not forbidden, 744—7. Neither a Belief that Evils may possibly befall us, 744—6. Nor using our Skill to judge what Evils may happen, 746. Nor Care and Foresight, when we think Evils are coming upon us, to prevent them, 746,7. Nor any general or particular Provision against Calamities, by proper Considera-

tions or Exercises, 747. But such an *Anxiety* about, or Fear of future Evils, as 1st. exceeds our Faith, when we either think the Evil we fear so unavoidable, that God cannot hinder it, 747,8, or so grievous as to be impossible for us to bear it, notwithstanding the divine Assistance, 748,9. Or, 2^{dly}, puts us upon unlawful Means to prevent its coming, 749. For such *Anxiety* implies a Disbelief of God's over-ruling Providence, *ibid.* and a Distrust of God's infinite Power, 749,50. and is unreasonable as it chuses Sin, a greater Evil, to avoid the less Evil of Punishment, 750. Or 3^{dly}, makes us as uneasy, as if the Evil we fear were actually present, 750,1. *Anxiety* on the account of future Evils vain and unreasonable, 753—6. For if the Evil we fear be small, there is no Reason to be anxious about it before-hand, 753,4. Nor should a great Evil be increased to no purpose, by a fruitless *Anxiety*, 754. Which is very unreasonable indeed, if the Evil be only possible, but not likely to come to pass, 754,5. But be it both very grievous, and very probable, yet possibly it may not come, and *Anxiety* will help to bring it upon us, 755. And if it be very grievous and unavoidable, yet *Anxiety* will neither prevent nor lessen it, 755,6. This *Anxiety* and Fear may be moderated and remedied by Reason and Religion, 756. For a Remedy of the *Anxiety*, 1st. learn true Notions of the things Men are most afraid of, which are not so bad as we generally take them to be, 756,7. Instanced in Disgrace, 757. Poverty 757,8. Pain, 758. Death, *ibid.* A second Remedy for *Anxiety* is a Belief of God's Providence ordering all things in this World, 759. Having a peculiar Care of, and Love to all Men, *ibid.* And never afflicting them but for their Good, 759,60. The best Remedy against *Anxiety* is a good Conscience, 760. As it makes almighty God our sure Friend, *ibid.* And by securing our main Concern, sets us at rest as to any thing else, 761. Lastly, drive out the Fear of temporal Evils by the Fear of God's Wrath, *ibid.*

See *Trust in God*.

APOSTLES. See *Evangelists*. The original Copies of some of their Epistles remaining in *Tertullian's* time, 975. A perfect Agreement between the Doctrines taught by them, and those taught by our Saviour 1021. Evidence from the Gospel of their divine Mission, *ibid.* The

same

the principal Matters, &c.

same Attestation from God of the Truth of their Doctrine, as our Saviour had, 1021, 2. The Case of St. Paul considered, 1022. Several Reasons why we should not wish to have the same Evidence of Faith as the *Apostles* had.

1030, 1

APPAREL, the Vanity of those Persons who affect, or are proud of, too splendid Apparel,

695, 6

ASSURANCE of Salvation; the want of it in some good Persons, more innocent, and less dangerous than an ill-grounded Assurance of it, 903, 4. Assurance towards God, is no certain Argument of a Man's being in a State of Salvation,

913

B.

BACKBITING, Talebearing, &c. to be avoided and discouraged.

111—3.

117, 8

BAPTISM with Water, necessary, 212. 901. Yet not sufficient to Salvation of it self without our performing the Covenant made in it,

901, 2

BATTOLOGY, What, 479, &c. See Repetitions.

BEATITUDES; the Blessedness promis'd in them of two Kinds, Present and Future, 4, 5. The present Blessedness not promis'd to each of them in the same respect, 4. Nor the Future to every one separately, but to all in Conjunction, 4, 5

BECKET Thomas, a Mover of Sedition in the State, canoniz'd by the Pope,

127

BELIEF. See Creed.

BBLIEVE, what the Sense of that Word every where in the N. T. 902.

See Faith.

BLESSEDNESS. See Beatitudes. See Poor, Mourners, &c.

BLESSING of God most necessary to our worldly Prosperity.

714, 5

BOOKS obscene. See Pictures.

BREAD in the Lord's Prayer signifies all things necessary for the Support, Convenience or Comfort of Life, 541, 2. And may take in Necessaries for our Souls, 542. But that not meant by our Saviour, *ibid.* Daily Bread signifies what is necessary, and no more than is necessary for our Subsistence, 542, 3. Asking our *Daily Bread* for this Day excludes all anxious Thoughts, even about Necessaries, for the Time to come, 543. The Reasonableness of asking temporal things with this Limitation, 543, 4. Our Saviour by teaching us to

pray for the Necessaries of Life, allows us to labour for them, 544. Teaching us to ask our *Daily-bread* this Day of God; informs us, that God is the Giver of Life, and all good things, 545. As we ask these things of God, who alone can give them, so ought we to thank him for them, when we receive them, 545, 6. This Petition discountenances immoderate Desires of worldly good things, especially for a very long time hence, 546, 7. And teaches us the Nature of Contentment, or what Portion we ought to be content with, 547. And how much we are obliged to frequent and constant Prayer, 547, 8. As we pray, so ought we to labour, for Necessaries, 548, 9. Seeing we beg our Bread of God, we ought not to receive it from the Devil, *i. e.* not to get or keep it by wicked Means, 549. Praying for our *Daily-Bread* we pray for the Supply of others Wants as well as our own, and so must endeavour to supply them according to our Power,

549, 50

BRITISH Constitution, the peculiar Happiness of it, 849. 113, 4. The Form of it, 1129. Some Considerations offered to satisfy the Consciences of those who think that the late Alterations made in it ought not to have been made, and though they are made, are null and invalid.

1129—31

BROTHER. The Scripture Notion of that Word, 224, 5. Our being all Brethren, what it should teach us.

510, 1

BROTHERLY Love press'd,

510

BRΩΣΙΣ. What,

643

C.

CALLED. To be called in Scripture often signifies to be,

121, 2. 187

CANDLE lighted, All Christians compared to it, 143—6. The Design of this Comparison,

151

CARE. All Care about wordly things not forbidden, 671—7. 707. Difference between diligent Care in honest Employments, and Anxiety and Solicitude for the Necessaries of Life, 672, 3. 704, 5. See Thought. The Care of the Event to be cast upon God, not the Care of the Means, 677. Some sort of Care excessive and forbidden, 680. Men prone to this excessive Care, *ibid.* 706, 7. Care is immoderate and blameable, when we desire more than is necessary and convenient, and cannot be satisfied with what is enough, 670, 1. Or when we are too anxious and solicitous even about Necessaries,

faries,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

faries, 671. And we are too anxious about Necessaries, when our *Care* and Solicitude is such as does no good, 680, 1. When it is unseasonable, 681. When we take more *Care* about worldly things than they deserve, 682. When it hinders us from a due *Care* of our spiritual Concerns, 682, 3. When this *Care* induces us to commit Sin, 683. When it is grounded upon and accompanied with a Distrust of God's fatherly *Care* and Providence, *ibid.* When it looks too far forward, 684, 5. And when it will not let us enjoy with Comfort, what God has given us at present, 685, 6. The Sinfulness of excessive *Care*, 688, &c. The Vanity and Unprofitableness of it, 693, 4. It's Unreasonableness, whether we consider what God has done for our selves or for inferior Creatures, 689—93. 694—7. The *Care* of our Souls above all other things most necessary and reasonable, 703—8. For it is much more important than the Pursuit of Riches, 704—6. 707, 8. See *Treasure, Wordly Goods, Riches*. Easier to procure Necessaries, than Assurance of everlasting Happiness, 704—6. Necessaries may be cared for as we come to have occasion for them; but the Affairs of our Soul must be minded before hand, and continually, 706, 7. We may provide more Riches than are good for us, but can never lay up too much Treasure in Heaven, 707, 8. The *Care* to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven is the chief End of our being created, and living in this World, and therefore should be attended to above all other things, 710—2. See *Kingdom of God*. This *Care* far more profitable than any worldly *Care*, 712. Because by this we provide for our Soul: Whereas all our worldly *Care* provides only for the Body, 712, 3. It tends to make both Body and Soul everlastingly happy, whereas worldly *Care* procures only the Pleasures of a Moment, 713, 4. It cannot but be to good purpose, whereas worldly *Care* is most commonly in vain, 714. For that is seldom sufficient to get or keep the good things of this World, 714, 15. And in possessing them does not meet with that Satisfaction it expected, 715—7. But he that seeks first the Kingdom of God, is sure to obtain what he pursues, 718. And to find full Satisfaction in what he obtains, 718, 9. See *Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*. Nor shall the *Care* we bestow upon our Souls bring us to want, but rather secure us

from it, 722, &c. For our Saviour promises to this *Care* all necessary Food and Raiment, 723. Provided we take an honest *Care* for a Maintenance, 723, 4. 731. And this promised Supply shall be afforded us, so long as it shall be good for us to live in this World, 724, 5. Unless in the Case of Persecution, when God makes us Examples of suffering for his own Glory, and the Benefit of the World, 725. And even in the time of Persecution a good Man is rarely destitute of Necessaries, *ibid.* And often by Contentment happier than the unsatisfied Rich, 725, 6. We are assured that our due *Care* about Matters of Religion shall be attended with a Competency of Necessaries for Life. *First*, From the Consideration of God's Goodness and Providence, 726, 7. See *Trust in God*. *2dly*, From the express Promises of God in holy Scripture, 727, 8. *Solomon*, a remarkable Example of this, 728, 9. There is no Reason to fear being brought to Poverty by making Religion our chief *Care*, from any thing in the Nature of Religion it self, 732, &c. The making Religion our chief *Care* is consistent with all such *Care* as is needful for the Body, 732—4. This *Care* not so much a Business of Time, as of Concern, Thought, Watchfulness and Resolution, 734. See *Religion*. Their Pretence vain, who object that it must be impossible for them to live, should they make Religion their chief *Care*, seeing they now use all Means, and make it their whole *Care* to get a Maintenance, and yet can scarce live, tho' they keep to themselves all they get, 739, 40. And theirs, who pretend if they were first rich, they would then seek the Kingdom of God. 740, 1

CENSURERS. The busiest Censurers of other Mens Lives, commonly least careful of their own, 776, 7. See *Judging*.

CHANGE. See *Government*. They may be said to be given to Change, who are ambitious of having a Share in the Government, 1131, 2. Who love to expose the Miscarriages of the Government, 1132. Who frame Lies that may prejudice it, *ibid.* Who go out of their Sphere to rectify the Disorders of the State, 1132, 3. They may be said to meddle with those that are given to change, who give them any manner of Encouragement in their irregular Proceedings.

the principal Matters, &c.

CHARITY to the Poor one of the greatest Commandments, as being a Duty of Natural Religion, 189, 90. As likewise most plainly and fully commanded by God, 190. And as to its Consequences, *ibid.* Charity, proper Objects of it, 391. Not those who do not want, 392. 1174. Nor those who, though in want, are able to maintain themselves, 392. 1174, 5. But the helpless Poor, 393. 1175, 6. See *Charity Schools*. To these we must give according to our Ability, 393, 4. 1176. Who they are that must give, 394, 5. 1176, 7. How much every Man must give, is a Question difficult to resolve, because it depends upon Circumstances that are various and mutable, 395, 6. 1177, 8. 1182. General Rules for settling the Proportion of our Alms; *First*, The Necessities of the Poor are to be considered, 396, 7. 1179. *2dly*, Give all you can spare in a frugal way of living, according to your Condition, 397, 8. 1179, 80. But some part of that may be reserved if a Man's Income be precarious, 398. 1180. *3dly*, Or if he has Children or Dependents to provide for, *ibid.* At least a twentieth Part of the clear Income should be given to the Poor, 399, 400. 1181, 2. But the more we give, the better, 400, 1. 1182, 3. Living suitably to our Condition, a *Charity* to the industrious Poor, 397. 1179. Profuseness no Excuse for Uncharitableness, 398, 1180. *Charity* towards Enemies, as well as others, necessary, 416, 7. Duties of *Charity*, how to be learnt easily, 845, 6. *Charity* and Beneficence a great Ornament to Religion, 167, 8. Christian *Charity*, the Perfection of it what, 423.

CHARITY-SCHOOLS, a Complaint of their late Erection in the Diocese of *Exeter*, 1183. 1187. The great Advantage of them, 1183. The most proper Objects of our *Charity*, as by this means we are sure it is not thrown away upon Cheats and Counterfeits, 1184. As we keep the poor Children from Idleness, the Mother of all Sin, 1185. And by this Method promote the Advantage of the Publick, *ibid.* As we do good not only to their Bodies, but to their Souls, by promoting their being instructed in the Christian Religion, 1185. And as this will prove a Benefit to succeeding Ages, 1186.

CHARLES I. King, his Character, 1074. 1078. A remarkable Instance that temporal Evils do not always befall Men for the Punishment of Sin, 1074, 5. His Vol. II.

Sufferings not to be parallel'd in History, *ibid.* He made great Improvements under them, 1076. His *Εἰκὼν Βασιλική* a Proof of this, *ibid.* A fit Person chosen by Providence to be an Example of suffering Virtue, 1078. Why we who live now so many Years since his Martyrdom, ought to keep up the Remembrance of it, 1080, 1. 1159. The ill Consequences of his Martyrdom were entailed upon Posterity, 1080. 1151, 2. How they may be improved into Blessings, 1156, 1160.

CHASTITY. See *Adultery, Woman, Marriage, Fasting.*

CHILDREN of God, 122, 3

CHILDREN, The Anxiety of Parents about a Provision for them, excellently remedied by the Consideration of God's being a wise and gracious Father to all Mankind, 837. Parents ought to breed their Children such, as God's Promises are made to, 838

CHILDREN sometimes bear the Iniquities of their Fathers, 1080. Proved from several Instances in Scripture, 1150, 1. The Justice of God vindicated in such a Procedure, 1151, Because the temporal Evils which the Children suffer, are the natural Consequences of their Fathers Sins, 1155. *2dly*, Because they are mostly only Privations of those Mercies which God out of his free Will had bestowed upon the Fathers, 1153, 4. *3dly*, God, by virtue of his sovereign Dominion over his Creatures, may put the most innocent of them into any Condition that is better than Non-existence, 1154, 5. *4thly*, The Calamities that are brought upon the Children are often very small Evils, or perhaps Blessings to them, though very great Punishments to the Father, 1155, 6. *5thly*, They are never greater than the Children themselves have deserved by their own Transgressions, 1156, 7. That God wou'd be pleased not to make us bear the Iniquities of our Fathers, a proper Matter of Prayer, 1158, 9. Our Liturgy vindicated in that particular, 1159

CHRIST conformed to the Customs of the Jewish Church, tho' of Jewish Institution, 3. See *the Law*. *Christ* came not to do our Work for us, 180. The Greatness of his Sufferings and Patience, 357, 8. A Pattern of loving Enemies, 432, 3. No Affecter of Novelty, 499. See *Scribes, Jews.*

CHRISTIANITY, how promoted. See *Design, Duties.* It made its Way in the World

An Alphabetical INDEX of

World notwithstanding the Opposition of Power and Interest, 991. 999. Tho' it was directly contrary to the Lusts and Passions of Men, 1004. Though it proposed to Mens Belief such Doctrines as appeared foolish or incredible, 1004, 5. Though destructive of all Forms of Religion established in the World, 1005. 1026. 1032. The Swiftneſs of its Progress an Argument that it was propagated by more than natural Means, 1003, 4. The Importance of the Truth of it should make us rather over credulous, than prejudiced against it, 1047. It should make us lay aside all the Byasſes that worldly Interest or Pleasure gives us, 1047, 8.

CHRISTIANS. See *Candle lighted, City on an Hill, Salt, the Sun, the Light of the World*. *Christians* wicked, their great Guilt and Danger, 147, 8. 165. The great Wickedness of too many, 204, 5. Primitive, their Justice, 165. Their Charity and Beneficence, 167.

CHRISTIANS of the first Ages not so over credulous as they are sometimes represented, 973. Nor so ignorant, 974. The Supposition that the *Christians* stifled and destroyed those Histories which were wrote against them, entirely groundless, 990, 1.

CHRISTIANS JUDAIZING. See *Judaizing*.

CHRISTMAS Holy-Days prophaned by Licentiousness, 180, 1. 1113. The Unsuitableness of such Behaviour to the Occasion, 1119, 20. The Abuse of them no Reason for laying aside the Observance of them, 1113. This proved from the Example of the *Jewish* Feasts, 1113—5. Greater Reason for observing this and other Christian Festivals than the *Jews* had for observing theirs. 1115. Several very proper Reflexions at this Season: 1st, We ought to consider the Dignity of the Person that was sent into the World, 1117, 8. 2^{dly}, The manner of his being sent, 1118. 3^{dly}, The End and general Design of his Incarnation, viz. redeeming Mankind from the State of Sin in which they were plunged, *ibid*. But more especially paying the Price of our Redemption, 1118, 9. These Considerations should work in us the greatest Love to him, 1119. Ought to have the greatest Influence upon our Lives, *ibid*.

CHURCH. See *Papists, Division*. Necessary to be of some Church or other, 1062. Highly unreasonable to separate

from the Church to which we belong till we have found a better that we may join our selves to, 1062, 3. 1066. The Offices of the Church not to be usurp'd by the Civil Power, 1167—9. If the Officers of the Church should encroach upon the Authority of the State, what would be the Consequence, 1169. Or Civil Power prohibit the Ministers of the Church in the Exercise of their Office, 1169, 70. Or actually usurp it, 1170. If the two Powers command two contrary things, which we are to obey, 1170, 1.

CIRCUMCISION, how far necessary, and what signified by it, 901, 2.

A CITY on an Hill, all Christians compared to it, 143—6. The Design and Fitness of this Comparison, and the Obligations arising from it, 149, 50.

CLERGY ought in a more especial Manner to be exemplary in their Lives, 143. 150.

COALS of Fire, to heap them upon our Enemy's Head, what. See *Enemy*.

COMMANDMENTS, our Lord's Addition to the sixth Commandment, 219, &c. To the seventh, 265, &c. To the third, 301, &c. The third Commandment cited by him, *Matth. v. 33*. though not in the very same Words, 302. See *Oaths*. The Commandments which Christ indispensably obliges us to obey, are not the Ceremonial, 183. Nor the Judicial, *ibid*. But the Moral Commandments of the Jewish Law, 183, 4. And some positive Commandments which he himself enjoined, 184. All equal as to the Authority commanding, *ibid*. But some greater or less than others, in regard of their subject Matter, 185. Of the different Manner in which they were commanded, 185, 6. And of their Consequences, 186. Doing and teaching others to do them highly rewardable, 188. Breaking, and teaching others to break the least of them, worthy of great Punishment, 188, 9.

COMMUNION frequent, promotes Church Unity, 100.

A COMPASSIONATE and pitiful Temper necessary for both Rich and Poor, 20, 1. The present and future Blessedness of such as are endued with this Temper, 21, 2.

COMPULSION. See *Persecution*.

CONDITION. See *Trespasſes*.

CONDITION, living frugally according to our Condition, a Charity to the industrious Poor, 397. 1179, 80.

CONFIDENCE.

the principal Matters, &c.

- CONFIDENCE. See *Assurance, Privileges.*
- CONSTITUTION. See *British, Jewish.*
- CONTEMPT of the World. See *World.*
- CONTEMPTUOUS Behaviour, the Guilt and Danger of it, 221, 2. 228, 9
- CONTENTMENT with their Condition necessary for the Poor and for the Rich, 14. The present and future Blessedness of the contented, 14, 5. Necessary to preserve publick Peace, 102, 3
- CONTENTION, Fomenters of it, 94, 5. 112, 3
- CONTENTIOUSNESS, 94
- COVETOUS worldly Man, compared to a Dog, 715, 6. *Covetousness* sets no Bounds to its Desires, 716
- COVETOUSNESS and true Religion absolutely inconsistent, 663—6
- The COUNCIL, what among the Jews, 221, 2. To be in Danger of the *Council* what, as threatned by Christ, 222
- CREDIBILITY of a Report depends upon three Particulars, 946. 1st, That the Matter of the Report be credible in it self, 946, 7. And that Matter is credible in it self which, though it could not be found out by natural Reason, yet implies no Contradiction, 947. 2^{dly}, That its Author be a Person of good Credit, 947. 3^{dly}, That he give the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular, 947, 8. The *Credibility* of a written Testimony, 977. See *Testimony.*
- CREED. Proper Considerations when we repeat it, 960—4
- CREDIT, not gained by common Swearing, 334, 5
- D.
- DAY of Grace, Some have outlived it, 261, 2
- DAILY. See *Bread.*
- DEATH, how far not dreadful, 758. Makes a manifest Distinction between the Hypocrite and good Christian, 916, 7. Neither an early, nor a violent, nor a suddain *Death*, so certainly evil as it is commonly supposed to be, 1100—2
- DEBTS. See *Sins.*
- DECREES. See *Glory.*
- DELAY. See *Repentance.*
- DESIGN, The *Design* or Aim of all our good Works should be the Glory of God and the Edification of our Neighbour, 152, 3. See *Kingdom of God.* Five Rules pursuant to this *Design*, 1st, We must avoid too retired a Life, 153—5. 2^{dly}, Approve the Goodness of our Actions, both as to their Matter and Intent, 155—7. 3^{dly}, By our Prudence endeavour to make Piety appear lovely, 157—9. 4^{thly}, Be exact in the Discharge of publick Duties, 159. 5^{thly}, Diligently practise those Virtues which are evidently worthy of Praise and Esteem, 162, 3. More especially Temperance, 163, 4. Justice, 164—6. Meekness or Humility with their Fruits and Effects, 166, 7. Charity and Beneficence, 167, 8. This how reconciled with the Secrecy required in performing some such Duties, 168, 9. 454—6. Motives to practise, 169—71
- DISCIPLES, What meant by that Word, 3, 4
- DISCOURSE obscene. See *Pictures.*
- DISGRACE undeserved, how easy to be despis'd, 757
- DISSENTERS. Some Considerations offer'd to them, 1064, 5. They cannot separate from us on Account either of better Prayers or Preaching than there is in our Church, 1068, 9
- DIVISIONS in the Church upon the account of indifferent Things, proceed not from the Spirit of Christianity, 2, 3. Unreasonableness of such, 1064, 5. 1068, 9. Should be discouraged by all, 100, 1. Ill Effects of them, 1002. An Enumeration of some of the *Divisions* from our Church, 1067, 8. See *Schism.*
- DIVORCE, Our Saviour's Law about it rather a Direction to Christian States than to private Christians, 288. How a Subject proper for a Sermon, 288, 9. *Moses* did not expressly and directly permit it, 289. Before the Law was given, the *Jews* usually put away their Wives for any Cause or Dislike, 289, 90. This Liberty somewhat restrain'd, by its being denied a Man to command his Wife back, and made unlawful ever to marry her again, if she was once married to another, 291. The Law of *Divorce* chiefly design'd the Relief of the Women, *ibid.* The Nature of a Bill of *Divorce*, *ibid.* A Woman divorced might marry any other Man, except the Priest, *ibid.* Christ forbids *Divorce* for any Cause but for Adultery, 291, 2. How he that puts away his Wife for any other Cause, causeth her to commit Adultery, 292. The Man after so unlawfully divorcing his Wife, may no more marry any other Woman, than she another Man, *ibid.* No Man may have more than one Wife living at the same time, unless

An Alphabetical INDEX of

unless his first Wife be divorced for Adultery, 293—6. He that has put away his first Wife for Adultery, not forbidden by Christ to marry another, 296, 7. But this forbidden by the Laws of the Land, *ibid.* A Caution inferred to the Unmarried, as to their Choice in matching, 297, 8. To married Persons, to make themselves easy by mutual Kindness and Forbearance, 299. And to all, by no means to create Uneasiness between married Persons, 299, 300

Do as ye would be done unto; This Rule not to be interpreted by our unreasonable Wishes, 840, 1. But by our just and reasonable Desires, *i. e.* Do to others as you would justly and reasonably desire they should do to you, 841, 2. The Rule thus expressed greatly enlightens our Understanding, and influences our Will, 842, 3. This Rule always kept in mind, is of manifold Use, 843. For it teaches us our Duty to each other in all Cases of Justice, 844. Of Mercy and Charity, 845, 6. And in all Relations wherein Men stand to one another, 846. We are obliged to observe this Rule, by the great Reasonableness and Equality of it, 847, 8. Because it is the only Means of obtaining and preserving Peace in our own Minds, 848. And of obtaining the Joys of Heaven, 848, 9

DOCTRINES, Great Care to be taken what *Doctrines* or Opinions we teach or maintain, 197, 8. Several Marks of false *Doctrines*, 179. 198. 878, 9. 889, 90. 1011. All especially are to be suspected which make the Way of Religion seem broad and easy, 858, 9. 1067. 1148. What Regard to be had to such as teach some false *Doctrines*, 895—7

DOGS, who meant by that Word, *Matth.* vii. 6. 796, 7. A covetous Man compared to a *Dog*, 715, 6.

The DOXOLOGY at the End of the Lord's Prayer contains both an Acknowledgment of the Greatness and Majesty of God, 616, 7. And some Reasons moving us to ask, and tending to incline Almighty God to grant the Requests we have put up, 617. Our Lord adding this *Doxology* to that Form and Pattern of Prayer which he has given us, teaches us in general that our Prayers should be accompanied with Adorations, Praises and Thanksgivings, 618. That *Doxology* teaches us particularly Submission, Trust, and continual worshipping of God, and aiming at his Glory, *ibid.*

A DUEL what, 375. Unlawful both

on his Part who gives the Challenge, 375, 6. and his who accepts and answers it, 376, 7

DUTIES of Christianity almost all of them carry their Reward with them, 459, 60. *Duties* of Justice, Mercy and Charity, and of our several Relations, how to be easily learnt, 844—7. The great Reasonableness and Easiness of all these Duties, 849, 50

E.

EDUCATION religious, makes a virtuous Life easy, 855

AN EFFECT in Scripture sometimes attributed to a necessary partial Cause, as if it were the adequate Cause of that Effect, 558, 9. *Effects* of our Lord's Sermon upon the Mount, on the *Jews* who heard it; they were astonished at the Excellency of his Doctrine, 937. Admired his Person, speaking so far above his Education, *ibid.* Were amazed at his miraculous Works, *ibid.* And concluded him to be an extraordinary Prophet, the Christ, or Messias, *ibid.* What *Effects* our Lord's Sermon ought to have upon us who read it, 937, 8. Since his Authority, which the *Jews* only thought probable, is demonstrated to us by the fulfilling of Prophecies in him, by his Miracles, and above all by his Resurrection, to be perfectly divine, 938, 9. We ought not only to admire the Wisdom of it, but set our selves with all Readiness and Diligence to obey it, 939

EFFICACY of God's Word and Sacrament does not depend upon the Worthiness of Ministers, but the Grace of God, 917, &c. See *Ministers*.

EIKH, Engl. *without a Cause*, *Matth.* v. 22. Whether this Word be retained or rejected, of no great Consequence, 225, 6

EK THTS may be rendred *from that Time*, or *Upon that Occasion*, 1056

END of Man's living in this World, is to prepare himself for a better, 710, 1

ENEMY, what meant by *Enemy* in the Law, 419. Hatred of an *Enemy*, how far permitted or commanded the *Jews* in the Law, 419, 20. Love of *Enemies* not commanded by the Law, 420, 1. but by the Gospel, 421. To love our *Enemies*, what, 421—3. The Practice of this Duty no hindrance to the legal Punishment of Malefactors, 424. Nor does it imply the same Treatment of Friends and *Enemies*, 424, 5. nor therefore likely to incline

the principal Matters, &c.

incline any to become our *Enemies*, in hopes to obtain our Love and Kindness, 425. Not base, but most honourable to love, and court the Friendship of our *Enemies*, proved from the Example of Almighty God, 428,9. Without the Practice of this Precept we are not better than the worst of Men, 429,30. Another Argument for loving our *Enemies*, is, that Mercy and Clemency is the most glorious Attribute of God himself, 431. And that it is therefore our greatest Perfection to resemble him in this, 431. 437,8. The Example of *Christ* a Motive to this Duty, 432,3. And that those, who in some Respects are our *Enemies*, are often in other Respects our Friends, and worthy of our Love, 433. The Benefits we receive from *Enemies*, *ibid*. To heap Coals of Fire upon an *Enemy's* Head, what, 433,4. Whence this Metaphor taken, 434. Loving our *Enemies*, the likeliest way to make them our Friends, 433,4. contributes much to our Ease and inward Quiet, both at present, 434,5. and hereafter, 435. Our Hope towards God depends much upon our doing this Duty, 435,6. See *Trespases*.

ESSENCE. We understand nothing of the *Essences* of Things, 1024. No wonder the *Essence* of an infinite Being should not be understood by us, *ibid*.

ESTEEM. See *Reputation, Design*.

ETERNAL Torments. See *Hell*.

ETERNAL Things, no Proportion between Temporal and Eternal Things, 486,7. 713,4.

ETERNITY. We can have no positive Notion of it, 960,1. See *Happiness, Hell, Life*.

EVANGELISTS were in the best Capacity to know the truth of the things they wrote 994,5. Under the strongest Obligations to write nothing but the Truth, 995,6. We have the greatest Evidence of their Honesty and Faithfulness, 997—1000. Their Impartiality in relating those things which might be accounted disgraceful to their Master or themselves, 997,8. Were Persons not liable to any just suspicion of unfaithfulness in their Relations, 998. They could have no worldly Design to promote in framing those Stories which they related, 999. No Threats nor Punishments could make them desist from bearing fresh Testimony to the Truth of the things related, *ibid*. The Differences between the *Evangelists* in relating the same Story very inconsiderable, 1008. An Argument that

VOL. II.

they did not combine together to write it, *ibid*. They are never inconsistent with one another, *ibid*. St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke* reconciled in their relation of *Judas's* Death, *ibid*. And in their account of our Saviour's Genealogy, *ibid*.

EVIDENCE. See *Revelation, Credibility, Faith, Sense*.

EVIL, to be overcome of it, what, 434. To overcome *Evil* with Good, what, *ibid*. *Evil* signifies three things: 1st, The *Evil* of Sin, 613. 2^{dly}, The *Evil* of Punishment, *ibid*. 3^{dly}, The *Evil* one, i. e. the Devil, who is the Cause of all Sin and Misery, *ibid*. From all these we pray to be delivered, in that Petition, *Deliver us from Evil, ibid*. See *Temptation*.

EXAMINATION of our past Life a proper Preparation for all solemn Worship, 233,4. Examination of our Hearts and Ways, how necessary, 914. How perform'd, *ibid*. See *Heart*.

EXAMPLE good, The Method of setting it, 152, &c. Motives to do so, 169—71. See *Design*. Men apt to live by *Example* rather than Precept, 202. But this unreasonable, 201. 203. 920.

EXCUSES for Common-Swearing considered, 331, &c. See *Swearing*.

EYE for *Eye*; a Rule for the Jewish Magistrate, not for private Men, 344. *Eye*; a Similitude between the Light of a Lamp or Candle, and the *Eye* of the Body, 647—9. *Eye*; by the *Eye, Matth*. vi. 22-3. our Lord does not mean the Intention, 649,50. nor the Appetites and Affections of the Mind, 650,1. nor the whole inner Man, 651. nor Bounty and Liberality by the single *Eye*, nor Covetousness by the evil *Eye*, 651,2. but the Understanding, or the Judgment, 652. For the Understanding is to the Soul what the *Eye* is to the Body, 652,3. And this Interpretation is very pertinent and agreeable to the Context, 654.

EYE-WITNESS. No necessity for one to prove that any Book was written by the Person who is said to be Author of it, 945,6.

F.

FAITH in Prayer; a sufficient Ground for it, 504,5. *Faith*, without a suitable Practice, not sufficient to Salvation, 902,3. The Grounds of our *Faith* reasonable, tho' we did not hear the Apostles themselves speak, 976,7. They are more convincing than if we had been in the same Circumstances with those that did, 1030,1. Unreason-

7 L

able

An Alphabetical INDEX of

able for us to desire such Evidence, 1031—3. That *Faith* is the more excellent which is not grounded upon Demonstration, 977, 8. Upon this account it is unreasonable to desire new Revelations, 1028, 9. 1040, 1. The Folly and Danger of rejecting that Evidence of *Faith*, which we now enjoy,

1034—7

FAITH, defined to be an assent of the Mind to the Truth of some revealed Proposition, 1088. In this sense St. *James* uses the word, *ibid.* It is sometimes used to signify both the Cause and the Effect, *i. e.* a Life led answerably to the belief of the Gospel-Truths, 1089. In this Sense St. *Paul* uses the word, *ibid.* 1094. It is often used by him for the whole Christian Dispensation, 1091. 1092, 3

FASTING sometimes signifies Abstinence from pleasant Food, and a very moderate and sparing Use, even of the meanest and least nourishing Meats, 628, 9. *Fasting*, in the strictest Sense, is a total Forbearance of Meat and Drink whilst the Fast continues, which was anciently from Morning until Evening, 629. This the only proper Scripture-Notion of *Fasting*, *ibid.* Our Lord supposes *Fasting* to be an acknowledged Duty, as he had done Alms and Prayer, 627, 8. 629, 30. and this in such a manner as has the Force of a Commandment, 630. He found *Fasting* not only grounded upon express Precept given to the Jews, but taught by the Light of Reason and Nature, 630, 1. From the N. T. *Fasting* appears to be acceptable to God, by Examples of it there praised, 631. a special Virtue and Efficacy there attributed to it, *ibid.* and a Reward promised to it, 631, 2. acceptable to God as a Sign of Repentance and Devotion, or Means of Virtue, 632. One end of *Fasting* is to subdue the carnal Desires of the Flesh, *ibid.* but to this end it must be habitual *Fasting*, or a constant Abstinence, *ibid.* Another, to maintain the Dominion of the Soul over the Body by frequent Acts of Self-denial, and what *Fasting* proper for this Purpose, 633. A third to exercise a Revenge upon our selves for our Sins, *ibid.* This is a natural Fruit, and a proper Expression, of a sincere Sorrow for Sin, *ibid.* The Advantage of it, *ibid.* In this Case it must be severe, 634. A fourth, to help us in Devotion and Prayer, *ibid.* How we must regulate it to this End, *ibid.* Proper Times and Occasions of *Fasting*, 634—6. All, whose Health will per-

mit, must fast when commanded by publick Authority, 634. Proper to fast after falling into a great Sin, 634, 5. when publick and national Wickedness is not sufficiently lamented by publick Fasts, 635. when in Danger of God's Judgments, *ibid.* when those Judgments are actually come upon us, *ibid.* whenever there is Occasion for more solemn Prayers and Supplications, 635, 6. For this Reason enjoined by the Church in *Ember Weeks*, 636. What our Lord intended in commanding us to anoint our Head and wash our Face when we fast, 636, 7. In publick Fasts, enjoined by Authority, Men may, and ought to appear to fast,

637

FATHER. Being taught to call God *Father*, assures us of his Goodness and Readiness to help us, 504. See *Success of our Prayers*, under the Head Prayer. Our *Father*, declares him a common *Father*, good to all, 504, 5. The Consideration of his being our gracious *Father*, affords great Comfort under our Infirmities, 835, 6. Our *Father* which art in Heaven, implies him infinitely able to help us, 505. Due to God as a *Father*, Honour and Reverence in Heart and Action, 506. especially when we approach him in religious Worship, 506, 7. Imitation and Resemblance, 507, 8. Trust and Dependence, 508, 9. Obedience, 509. meek and patient Submission to all his Corrections, 509, 10. As God is our common *Father*, so all we are Brethren, and should so behave ourselves, 510. We should pray together to our common *Father*, 511. and intercede with him for all Mankind, *ibid.* As God is our *Father* in Heaven, we should rely on his Power, and adore his great Majesty,

ibid.

FAULTS. Every Man ought to spy out and correct his own *Faults*, 787. This more especially necessary for those who take upon them to correct and reform the *Faults* of others, 787, 8. whose undertaking to do so is otherwise shameful, 788. Without Pretence of Reason, 788, 9. fruitless and mischievous, 789. A Caution inferr'd to Ministers, *ibid.* Magistrates, 790. Parents, and Masters of Families,

ibid.

FEAR of God induces and comprehends our whole Duty to him, 1122: God *first*, that is more, to be feared than the King,

1124

FESTIVALS Religious. See *Christmas Holydays.*

FLESH

the principal Matters, &c.

FLESH and Blood of the Son of Man, *John vi.* signifies the Doctrine of Christ, 64

FOOL. What meant by saying *Thou Fool*, 229, 30. And when wicked and dangerous, 230

FORGIVENESS. The Consideration of doing as we would be done by, a Motive to it, 845, 6. See *Trespases*.

FORMS of Prayer one Advantage of them, 621. See *Set Forms of Prayer*, under the *Head Prayer*.

FRUGALITY. See *Industry*. Necessary in order to Charity, 397, 8. 1179, 80. The prudence of it in general, 963

FRUITS. What those *Fruits* are, by which false Prophets may be discerned from true ones, 887, &c. Not the manner of their Life and Conversation, so as that we are obliged to reject all Doctrines preached by wicked Men, 887, 8. For some wicked Ministers, teaching true Doctrines, are not false Prophets, *ibid.* And Hereticks, notwithstanding their Sheeps cloathing, their seemingly or really virtuous Conduct, are false Prophets, 888, 9. But those *Fruits* are the *Fruits* of their Doctrines, those Practices which their Doctrines naturally tend to promote, 889, 90. And we must judge of the *Fruits* of Mens Doctrines either by our natural Reason, 894. Or by the Word of God, 894, 5. If we discern the *Fruits* of their Doctrines to be evil, we must reject the Doctrines as false, and the Men as false Prophets, if they pretend to no other Authority, but that of divine Mission and Inspiration, 895. But if the Teachers of such Doctrines have been ordained by the Governors of the Church, we are not totally to reject them, if their Doctrine be sound in the main, 895. Our Lord thus determined this very Case with respect to the Scribes and Pharisees, 896

G.

GALILEANS. How *Pilate* mingled their Blood with their Sacrifices, 1096

GARNET, one of the Chief in the Gunpowder Plot, a Romish Saint, 127

GEENNA. What it signifies, 223

GENTILES Magnified their Philosophy and all natural Religion, 1090, 1

GHOST HOLY. His Consolations make Men happy under Afflictions, 27

GIFT. See *Altar*.

GIFTS of God the most excellent and spiritual, are sometimes given to bad Men, for the Benefit of others, 916.

Yet no certain Sign of God's Favour to them, and then much less are his temporal Gifts any Sign of his Favour or approbation, 916, 7. Therefore we are not to judge of Actions or Causes by Success, but by Scripture and Reason, 917. Nor be dejected by Adversity, or puff'd up by Prosperity, *ibid.*

GLORY. There are Degrees of Glory in Heaven, 139, 40. This a just Incitement to great Diligence in doing our Duty, 140

GLORY of God. See *Design*.

GOD often afflicts those whom he loves, 26, 7. See *Afflictions*, *Judgment*. God often, but not always, forbears to inflict temporal Judgments upon the Penitent, 39, 40. *Seeing God*, three Senses of that Expression, 85—7

GOD's Perfections ought to be imitated by us, 438, 9. See *Father*. Not the incommunicable Perfections of his divine Nature, 439, 40. Nor his Knowledge, unless with proper Bounds, 440. But his moral Perfection only, and in this the more like we are to him, the better, 440. Particularly as to the Integrity of his Moral Perfection, 440, 1. 445. For the Possibility of this, consider that the Perfection of any thing is to be measured by its Nature, 442. And Men are perfect, as God is perfect, when they resemble him as much as their Nature allows, though they do not equal him in Goodness, *ibid.* When they are perfect and sincere in their Will and Endeavour, tho' not in their Work, 442, 3. And when they continually aim at their higher Degrees of Perfection, 443, 4. In all God's Commandments, 445. And that always, so imitating the perfect Duration of his Goodness, 445

GOD's Goodness and Knowledge of our Wants before we ask does not render Prayer needless, 488, 9. 807, 8. See *Father*. God the only Object of Prayer, 503, 4. See *Name*, *Kingdom*, *Will of God*, *Temptation*. God the Giver of Life and all good Things, 545. And therefore he should receive our Thanks for them, 545, 6. See *Mammon*, *Trust in God*, *Care*, *Thought*, *Righteousness*. God's great Condescension to remove our Doubts, and strengthen our Trust in him, 824. See *Success in Prayer*, under the *Head Prayer*. God does to us what he would have us do to others, 839. Therefore we should do to others what we would have them do to us, 839, 40. See *Gifts of God*.

GODLINESS. See *religious Life*.

GOSPEL,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

GOSPEL, wherein stricter, wherein easier, than the Law, 231. It is not certain in what Year the *Gospels* were written, 983. That of St. *John*, the latest of them, *ibid.* That of St. *Mark*, dictated by St. *Peter*, 994. St. *Luke*'s wrote not from the Writer's own Knowledge, but from the credible Information of others, 995. The same must be granted of some few Particulars in all the *Gospels*, 995. See *History*.

GOVERNMENT easy and tyrannical, the Difference between them, 849. God's *Government* most easy as to his Laws about our Dealings with each other, 849, 50. No particular Form of *Government* can be said to be of divine Institution, 1126. No change of one Form of *Government* into another is in itself unlawful, provided it be made by those who have power to make it, 1126—8. Tho' the power that all Governors have is from God, yet the Appointment of particular Persons to the Administration of the *Government* is human, 1128. 1162—5. Tho' Changes in *Government* are lawful, yet mostly dangerous, 1129. Most reasonable that in every Place that should be taken to be the most rightful *Government* which is established, 1162

GRACE.

See *Day*.

GRACE of God, without it we cannot do his Will, 537, 8. Prayer made the Condition of obtaining it, 611. Forfeited by Sin, therefore to be beg'd as a Favour, 611, 2. We must labour for it and with it, 613, 4

H.

HABITS evil, their Force, 855, 6. 863

HALLOW. To *hallow* any thing signifies either to make it holy, or set it apart for sacred Uses, 515. Or to use it as an holy thing, after it is so consecrated, 515. See *Name of God*.

HAPPINESS wherein it consists, 958. the *Happiness* which the Scripture proposes to us of endless Duration, 958, 9. represented as the compleatest we are capable of, 962. See *Life*.

HAPPY. Who the most *happy* of all God's Creatures, 36, 7

HAVE. To *have* ought against any, what, 232

HEARING the Word of God is in order to practice, and most vain and insignificant without it, 904, 5, &c. 915, 6.

HEART. See *Pure*. Our Care for outward Righteousness must begin at the

Heart, 215, 6. How to know whether our *Hearts* be right with God, 914. 927.

HELL described as a Prison, and its Terrors, 259, 60. Its Torments eternal, 260. 959. The intenseness of them, 962. The Descriptions in Scripture of Hell and Heaven not to be understood literally, *ibid.* See *Life*.

HELL-FIRE, to be in Danger of it, what, 145

HISTORY. The *Evangelical History* is contain'd chiefly in the four *Gospels* and Acts of the Apostles, 994. Highly credible if we consider the Circumstances of the Matters therein recorded, 981—92. They are for the most part plain Matters of Sense, 981, 2. And those done in the Presence of a great many, 982. The Matters recorded are such, and related in such a Manner by the Evangelists, that if the *History* had been false it could never have gain'd Credit, 982—8. 996. As it contains matters of Fact, it would have been easy to have disproved any one that had been false, 983. Especially as the Facts are related to have been done in the same Country, in which the *History* was first publish'd, *ibid.* And as the *History* was publish'd within a few Years after the Things therein recorded are said to be done, *ibid.* As the Facts are related with all the Circumstances that are proper to render an Enquiry into the truth of them easy, 984. As the Facts are related to have been done publickly and well-known to a great many, it was easy for any one to disprove the Relation if it was false, 985. As they were of the greatest Consequence they engaged every one to make the strictest Enquiry into the truth of them, 987, 8. And notwithstanding all this, the *History* remaining still of good Credit, not pretended to be disproved either by Jews or Mahometans, is a certain Argument of its being genuine, 988. It never was disproved by other Histories, 989. But in many Particulars confirmed by them, 1002. 1003. 1006. Why no more particulars mentioned by other Historians 1006, 7. Upon all Accounts at least equal Grounds to believe the *Gospel-History*, as any other, 970. 1041. Upon several Accounts much greater, 992. 996, 7. 999. **HOLINESS** indispensably necessary, 179. 180. No Doctrine to be admitted, which dispenses with it, 198, 9

HONOUR.

See *Reputation*.

HONOUR

the principal Matters, &c.

HONOUR lays an Obligation on all Men to speak the Truth, 993

HOPE. See *Trust in God*.

HUMILITY, why called Poverty of Spirit, 9. What *Humility* is, *ibid.* The natural Fruits of it, *ibid.* 166. The present Blessedness of it, as creating Love and Esteem, 113. 117. And this to our Religion as well as our selves, 166, 7. Tranquillity of Mind, 10. 13. An Aptness to obey the Gospel, 10, 1. As having the Promise of God's Grace, 11. The future Blessedness of it, *ibid.* 14

HUMILITY necessary for all, the Rich as well as the Poor, 12, 3

HUNGER and Thirst after Righteousness; the Blessedness of those who do so, not absolute but comparative, 59, 60. Who they are that do so, 61—3. The present Blessedness of such, as they enjoy spiritual Health, 64, 5. Their future Reward, 65. Their Desire shall be satisfied, 65—7. Their Satisfaction a complete Happiness, 67, 8. See *Care*.

HYPOCRITES distinguish'd from true Christians by a State of strong Temptation, which will destroy the Virtue of the one, but confirm that of the other, 924—7. and by sore and grievous Afflictions, which overthrow the Hope of the Hypocrite, but settle that of the good Christian, 927—9. And by the Approach of Death, which discovers the weak Foundation of the *Hypocrite's* Hope, and overwhelms him with Terrors, but increases the Hopes of the Upright, and fills him with Comfort, 929, 30. But most especially by the Day of Judgment, 930, 1.

I.

St. JAMES. His Epistle at first not universally received, 972. See *St. Paul*.

IDOLATRY. The Overthrow of it deprived many of a Livelihood, 987

JESUS proved to be the Christ, 178, 9. As well from his own Testimony of himself, whilst on Earth, 1010—12. as from God's, by the ancient Prophets, 1012, 3. by *John the Baptist*, 1013. by a Voice from Heaven, 1013, 4. See *Prophecy*, *Miracles*. By raising him from the Dead, 1019. The Assurance we have of this Truth is the greatest possible, 1020. The Knowledge of his Pedigree, and the other Marks of his being the *Messiah*, a Matter of the greatest Consequence to the World, 985. 1012, 3. The Circumstances which the Evangelists relate

Vol. II.

of his Birth are of such a Nature as might easily be disproved, if false, 985, 6. See *History*. His Life spotless and unblameable, 1011

JEWISH Doctors usually composed Prayers for their Scholars, 492. The *Jewish* Constitution what, 1125

JEWS. See *Divorce*, *Revenge*. The Mistakes and Abuses they were guilty of as to Oaths, 321. For what Reason called *Dogs* in Scripture, 796, 7. Several flagrant Instances of their Depravity reckon'd up by *Isaiah*, 1112. Their Prophaneness and Intemperance at their religious Feasts, 1112, 3. See *St. Paul*.

IMAGINATIONS relating to sinful Actions make us guilty before God of Sins we never acted, 81. 268, 9. Greatly multiply any single Act of Sin, 81, 2

IMITATION of God's Excellencies. See *God's Perfections* under the Title *God*, *Father*.

IMPRUDENT Severity and Singularity prejudicial to Religion, 157, 8

INCONSIDERATION, more ruin'd by it than by Infidelity it self, 960

INCONTINENCE. See *Marriage*.

INDUSTRY, Temperance and Frugality necessary both for Poor and Rich, 16, 7. The present Blessedness and future Reward of these Virtues, 17, 8

INFALLIBILITY not sufficient to prevent Schisms in the Church, 1054. No Necessity for an *infallible* Guide, 1054, 5

INFERIORS, Meekness towards *Inferiors*, wherein it consists, 53, 4

INFIDELITY, the Folly of it supposing there were no Certainty in Religion, 962—4. 1047. 1050. The Imprudence of publishing it, with respect to this World, 1048. Much greater of propagating it, 1049, 50. See *Faith*, *Christianity*, &c.

INFIRMITIES unavoidable, Comfort under them from the Consideration of God's being our most wise and good Father, 835, 6

INJUSTICE of all Kinds, the Folly and Madness of it, 250—3

INTENTION. See *Design*, 649, 50

INTERCESSION for all Men in Prayer, a Ground for it, 511

INTEREST, Arguments drawn from it most strongly persuade us to any thing, 958

INTERPRETING. See *Law*, *Laws of God*, *Effect*.

JOB, His Character, 1072. The Greatness of his Sufferings in his Estate, his Children, and his Person, 1072, 3.

7 M

A

An Alphabetical INDEX of

A signal Instance that temporal Evils are not always inflicted for the Punishment of Sin, *ibid.*

JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS rejected the two first Chapters of St. *Matthew*, and all the Epistles of St. *Paul*, 972. This no Argument against the Authority of them, *ibid.*

JUDGING may be taken either in a good or bad Sense, but most commonly used in a bad one, wherever the Judgment of Men is mentioned in Scripture, 762, 3. We are not forbidden to make or give our *Judgment* of things, with respect to Truth and Falshood, Good and Evil, 763, 4. Nor of our selves or our own Actions, 764. Nor is all *judging* or condemning the Persons or Actions of others here forbidden, *ibid.* Particularly not the *judging* of the Civil Magistrate, *ibid.* Which is not properly the Judgment of Man, but of God, 764, 5. Neither is all private *Judging* forbidden, 765. As where the Crime is notorious and evidently seen, *ibid.* Nor a charitable Jealousy of what we do not see, in those under our Care, or for brotherly Admonition, 765, 6. Nor a *Judgment* of Prudence and Caution, of which an Instance given, 766, 7. But we are certainly forbidden all false and injurious *Judging*, 767. and all rash *Judging*, *ibid.* And this we are guilty of when we *judge* hardly of our Neighbour, only from uncertain Report, 767, 8. When we pass Sentence against him, without hearing what he has to say in his Defence, 768. When we put the worst Interpretation upon such Words or Actions as are capable of a good Sense, 768, 9. When we aggravate his Crime, and determine the Degree of his Guilt, 769. When we condemn a Man as a Reprobate from one or two Actions, without regarding the general Tenor of his Life, 769, 70. When we pretend to *judge* of Mens Thoughts and Intentions farther than they are declared by plain Words and certain Signs, 770. When we *judge* of Mens State towards God, by the good or evil things which befall them in this World, 770, 1. 1075. See *Judgments temporal*. We are forbidden all needless *judging*, when neither any Office calls, nor Charity moves us to it, 773. And we must not declare our *Judgment*, even in notorious Faults, unless obliged to it by Justice or Charity to our selves or others, 773, 4. Under needless *judging* is comprehended a need-

less and over-curious Inquisitiveness into the Faults of others, 774. *Judging* easy to be avoided, therefore more sinful when we are guilty of it, 775. *Judging*, censuring such as are not under us, an Usurpation on God's Right, *ibid.* It is contrary to that Justice and Equity due to our Neighbours, 775, 6. It is uncharitable, 776. Sins of the worst sort, included in rash *judging*, 784. *Judging* others foolish, as it takes us off from our own Concerns, 776, 7. It is foolish, as it brings upon us the Hatred and Censures of others, 777. As it provokes God to *judge* us with the same *Judgment* wherewith we *judge* others, 777, 8. Absurd for one Sinner to *judge* another, 782. Remedies to prevent and cure the Sin of *Judging*, are 1st, To be in Charity with all Men, 778. 2^{dly}, Never to make or give our *Judgment* concerning any Person whom we are at Enmity with, 778, 9. 3^{dly}, Where we may, and ought to *judge*, we should yet be very slow in making our *Judgment*, 779. 4^{thly}, Often call to Mind the Mistakes we have already committed in *judging* others, *ibid.* 5^{thly}, Never talk of other Mens Lives and Actions, at least speak nothing ill of them, but for the weightiest Reasons, *ibid.* 6^{thly}, Frequent Reflection upon, and endeavouring to amend our own Faults, will cure us of our own Proneness to *judge* others, *ibid.* 782, 3. 787. Persons prone to *judge* and censure others, are commonly worse than those whom they censure, 784—7. For the Faults commonly *judged* of and censured, are either smaller or supposed Faults, called Motes 784—6. But the Sins implied in rash and uncharitable *judging* are very grievous, and not easily repented of, represented by Beams, 786, 7.

JUDGMENT, in the last *Judgment*, special Regard will be had to Works of Mercy, 21. Why called by St. *Peter* the Time of refreshing, 40. To be in Danger of the *Judgment*, what under the Law of *Moses*, 220. What as threatened by our Saviour, 220, 1. *Judgment* of God just and strict, 258, 9. The Sentence therein pass upon the Impenitent most severe, 259, 60. The Day of *Judgment* will set right all Mistakes of Men concerning themselves or others, 920, 1. Distinguish the Hypocrite from the good Christian, 930, 1. *Judgments* temporal. See *God*. In all the temporal *Judgments* whether brought about by the Wickedness of Men, or by natural Causes, we

the principal Matters, &c.

ought to acknowledge the Hand of Providence, 1097. Though all temporal *Judgments* are Expressions of God's Displeasure against Sin, yet we cannot take upon us to say what, or whose Sins were the Occasion of them, 1098. 1185, 6. The passing such a *Judgment* unwarrantable by Scripture, 1098, 9. No Ground from Reason for it, whether we argue from God's Purity and Holiness, 1099. Or from his Justice, *ibid.* Or from his being Governor of the World, 1099. 1100. Such a *Judgment* liable to great Mistakes, 1100. We may be mistaken in the Nature of those things which we account good or evil, 1100—2. And especially when we reckon them Marks of God's Love or Hatred, 1102, 3. As such a *Judgment* is rash, so we may be assured in many Instances it would have been false, 1103. Instanced in the *Galileans*, *ibid.* In the Prophets of *Judah* and *Bethel*, 1104, 5. In *Josiah*, 1105. In the holy Martyrs, *ibid.* Temporal *Judgments* are most commonly designed for national Punishments, 1106. The Wisdom of God in punishing the Good and Bad promiscuously, 1106, 7. This Procedure is an Argument of God's highest Displeasure, 1107, 8. The Use we ought to make of God's *Judgments*, 1106—8. The great *Storm* consider'd as a signal *Judgment* of God, and the Use to be made of it, 1108—10

JUSTICE and Honesty in all our Dealings, a necessary Ornament of Religion, 164—6. *Justice* as necessary as Piety, 234—6. 243, &c. Acts of it when preferable to Acts of Worship, 235, 6, &c. See *Injustice*. The Duties of *Justice* between Man and Man, how to be learnt with Ease, 844

JUSTIFY. In what Signification the Word used in Scripture, 1085, 6. A twofold *Justification*: 1st, At our Admission into the Christian Religion by Baptism, 1086. 2^{dly}, Our final *Justification* at the Day of Judgment, *ibid.* The former is what St. *Paul* refers to, when he mentions *Justification by Faith*, the latter what St. *James* refers to, when he mentions *Justification by Works*, 1086—8

K.

KING. Accountable to God only, 126. Deposing and murdering him for the Cause of Religion, wicked and inconsistent with all Government, 126, 7.

We are never discharged from our Subjection to him, tho' in some Cases we are from our Obedience, 1122, 3. 1124, 5. 1166. The bad Qualifications of a *King*, no Reason for our Disobedience, 1133. Whence *Kings* called *Gods* in Scripture, 1124. The *King's* Power not inherently in himself, but derived from God, 1163. Though in Elective Kingdoms the People chuse the *King*, yet is not his Power derived from them, 1163, 4. His Power of Life and Death could be conferred by none but God, 1164. That his Power is derived from the aggregate Body of the People, is a Position false in Fact, 1164, 5. Fearing God and the *King*, are not two Duties inconsistent, 1124, 5. Loyalty to the *King* is best secured by our Religion towards God, 1125

KINGDOM of God, understood generally, signifies his sovereign Power and Dominion, preserving and ordering all Things, 522. The coming of God's *Kingdom* in this Sense not Matter of Petition, but of Joy and Thanksgiving, 522, 3. Understood specially, signifies that free Subjection which all reasonable Creatures ought to pay him, 523. This twofold, his *Kingdom* of Grace, and his *Kingdom* of Glory, *ibid.* 1st, His *Kingdom* of Grace, or the Profession and Practice of the Christian Religion, 524. The Reason of that Name, *ibid.* This again both external, being the outward State or Profession of true Religion, which was once the Jewish, but is now the Christian, 524, 5. What we mean by praying that his *Kingdom* in this Sense may come, 525. And God's internal *Kingdom* of Grace when Christ rules in Mens Hearts, and renders them sincerely obedient to him, *ibid.* What is meant by praying, that this internal spiritual *Kingdom* of Grace may come, 526. 2^{dly}, God's *Kingdom* of Glory after the Judgment, *ibid.* We must not pray for the coming of this *Kingdom* of God absolutely, but in Subordination to the other Sense of it, 526, 7. As we pray for the coming of God's outward *Kingdom* of Grace, we ought to endeavour by all means that the Christian Church may be enlarged, 527. Especially by good Example, 527—9. See *Design*. As we pray, that God's inward *Kingdom* of Grace may come, we ought to yield him our own Hearts, and an entire Obedience, 529. As we pray, that God's *Kingdom* of Glory may come, we ought

An Alphabetical INDEX of

ought to be diligent in preparing for it, 530, 1. *Kingdom of God*, *Matth.* vi. 33. signifies the Glory and Happiness which God has prepared for good Men in another Life, 700, 1. To seek it what, 701. To seek it first signifies, to be pious betimes, and bestow as much Time as is possible upon the Work of our Salvation, 702. And to make Religion the chief Business of our Lives, 703. See *Care*.

KINGDOM of Heaven, What meant by that Phrase, 28. What to be called the least or greatest in it, 187

KNOWLEDGE of our Duty may be separated from the Practice of it, and then by no means available to Salvation, 915. 919. Therefore practical Knowledge of Books, and Portions of Scripture, most valuable, 915. And Practice, the End of our using any of the Means of Knowledge, Hearing, &c. *ibid.*

ΚΡΙΣΙΣ, one Sense of that Word, 220

L.

LABOURERS. See *Servants*.

LAMENTATIONS of Jeremiah, upon what Occasion written, 1149

LANGUAGE provoking. See *Peace*. Reproachful and scurrilous, the Guilt and Danger of it, 222—4. 228, 9. See *Anger*, *Satisfaction*.

The *LAW*, Why Christ declared, that he came to fulfil it, 172, 3. What meant by the *Law* and the Prophets, 173, 4. To destroy them what, 174. What it is to fulfil them, *ibid.* Christ did nothing to destroy the *Law*, neither by his Life and Conversation, 174, 5. Nor by his Doctrine, 175. How he fulfilled the moral *Law*, 175, 6. How the judicial, 176. How the ceremonial, *ibid.* How the Prophets, 176, 7. Its Perpetuity how to be understood, 178. The ceremonial *Law* not destroyed but expired, 177, 8. Inferences from all this, 178—81. The true Meaning, not the Letter only, of the *Law*, to be observed, 210—14. Yet no such Interpretation of it to be allow'd as makes void the Letter, 211—3. See *Gospel*. How to know perfectly what Alteration our Lord's Sermon has made in the *Law*, 360—2. Positive Laws given the *Jews* oblige not other Nations, unless reinforced in the N. T. 411

LAWS of God, the true Method of expounding them, 233. See *Law*. *Laws*

of God all equally oblige, 904, &c.

LAWs. Whence the Necessity of altering and repealing *human Laws*, 943, 4. This no Argument against the Sufficiency of a divine Revelation, 944. See *Revelation*.

LAW-SUITS seem to be absolutely forbidden by our Lord, *Matth.* v. 40. 380, 1. But the intolerable Consequences of such a Prohibition are a just Prejudice against that Interpretation, 381. Those Words taken by themselves do not necessarily forbid all *Law-Suits*, 382. But taken with the Context forbid only the malicious Abuse of *Law*, 382—4. Nor is all going to *Law* forbidden, 1 *Cor.* vi. 7. But suing in Heathen Courts, 384—6. And that Fault or Injustice in one of the Parties, which occasions the *Suit*, 386, 7. What sort of *Law-suit* without such a Fault, 386. *Law-Suits*, though not sinful, yet dangerous, 387. And these Cautions to be observed in the Use of them: We must be sure our Cause is just, 387, 8. And the Thing contended for of considerable Value or Consequence, 388. We must not enter into it for the sake of Contention, but Justice, *ibid.* Nor make it a means of Revenge, 388, 9. But chiefly we must be in perfect Charity with our Adversary, 389

LAZARUS in Abraham's Bosom. The Design of the Parable, 940

LENDING to the Poor commanded, 410, 1. See *Usury*.

A *LIE*, always counted dishonourable, 995

LIFE EVERLASTING. What meant by it in the Creed, 960. Some Reflections on that Article, 960—4. Supposing there were no certain Proofs of a Life after this, yet in common Prudence, we ought to take the best Care we can, that if there should be one, we may be happy in it, 962—4. 1047. 1050.

LIGHT, if the Light that is in thee be Darkness, *Matth.* vi. 23. This Expression not improper, 648. See *Eye*.

LIGHT, To let our Light shine before Men, what, and how best performed, 152, &c. How reconciled with the Secrecy required in some Duties, *Matth.* vi. 1, 2, &c. 168, 9. 454—6

LIGHT of the World, Christians in general are or ought to be, 143—6. The Fitness of, and Duty arising from, the Comparison, 148, 9

LITANY. See *Children*.

LITURGY of the Church of England, if taken from the Mass-Books, as it is not,

the principal Matters, &c.

not, that would be no just Objection against it, 499, 500

LORD, LORD, Who say thus to Christ, but yet shall be excluded from his Kingdom, 901—7. They who are baptized into his Name, but do not perform the Covenant made in their Baptism, 901, 2. They who make Profession of the Christian Religion, without an inward Assent to the Truth of it, 902. They who profess and believe the Christian Religion, but do not live answerably to their Belief, 902, 3. They who hope and trust in Christ for Salvation, but do not take care to do what Christ has commanded, 903, 4. They who are punctual in God's Worship, Prayer, Reading, Hearing, Sacraments, but do not practise Justice, Righteousness, Peace and Love towards Men, 904—7. 915, 6. Calling Christ, *Lord, Lord*, by hearing the Word of God, and Prayer most vain and insignificant without Practice, 905—7

LORD'S PRAYER. See *Prayer*.

LOVE. See *Neighbour, Enemy, Brotherly*.

M.

MAGISTRATE. His Power to punish not abolished by our Lord's Precept against Revenge, 361, 2. Nor by that of loving our Enemies, 424. Otherwise Christ would, in this Particular, have destroyed the Law, 362, 3. This Power of the *Magistrate* confirmed by the Gospel, 363, 4. We must not defend our selves against him by forcible Resistance, 368, 9. See *Kings*. The *Magistrate's* judging the Persons and Actions of others not forbidden, 764, 5. See *Faults*. He may use the temporal Sword in Matters of Religion, on some particular Occasions, 1060

MAMMON is a *Syriac* Word, signifying sometimes Riches or Treasure, 660. Sometimes the Idol or Devil who falsely is thought, or pretends to be, the Disposer of worldly Wealth, 660, 1. A Servant of *Mammon* is one who thinks Riches the highest Happiness of Man, and seeks them above all other Things, 661. Whereas the Servants of God, in all Conditions, set the highest Value upon Heaven, and seek that in the first Place, 662, 3. No Man can serve God and *Mammon*, 663. For these two Masters do both of them require, that their Servants should be wholly devoted to

them only, 663, 4. And their Wills are not only different, but often contrary to each other, 664. This instanced in many Particulars, 664—6. *Mammon's* Service compared with that of God, 666, &c. *Mammon's* Proposals are deceitful, 666, 7. His Wages sometimes not paid, 667. At other times soon lost, *ibid*. No perfect Happiness when longest enjoyed, *ibid*. And often the Ruin of their Possessors, *ibid*. The Service of God required often in part, with the Necessaries and Conveniencies of this Life, 668. But chiefly and certainly with the substantial, solid, and never-failing Happiness of Heaven, 668, 9

MAN. The Soul is the *Man*, 712, 3. *Man*, in what respect the most unhappy Part of the Creation, 750, 1

MARRIAGE necessary, where Incontinence cannot otherwise be avoided, 284, 5. What to be considered in the Choice of a Match, 297—9. Agreement in Religion much to be regarded in such a Choice, *ibid*.

MARTYRDOM, the Lot of all the Apostles and Evangelists, but St. *John*, 1000. Not likely any Man would suffer *Martyrdom* for a known Falshood, *ibid*. Why the Church celebrates the Days of the *Martyrdom* of the Saints as Festivals, 1079. Why King *Charles's* *Martyrdom* not a Festival, 1079, 80

MASTERS of Families. See *Faults*. No Man can serve two *Masters*; true with some Exceptions, 659, 60. For we may serve two *Masters* who are subordinate the one to the other, 659. And two of equal Authority if their Wills are always the same, 659, 60. And two *Masters* of different Wills successively, 660

MATTHEW Saint, The two first Chapters of his Gospel rejected by the *Judaizing* Christians, 994

MEATS and Drinks, Advice in the Use of them, 282

MEEK, who, 42, 3, &c. The Behaviour of the *Meek* in Prosperity or Adversity, 52, 3. Towards God, 53. Towards Men in all Relations, 53—5. Their present Blessedness, 55, 6. The Meaning and Certainty of the Promise that *they shall inherit the Earth*, 56, 7

MEEKNESS does not extinguish but moderate Anger, 43. The Bounds it prescribes that Passion, 45—50. It influences our whole Conversation, 52. Creates Esteem both for our selves and our Religion, 166, 7

7 N

MERCY,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

MERCY, how it differs from Charity, 69, 70. Who are proper Objects of it, *ibid.* What inward Affection of the Mind, towards such Objects is meant by *Mercy*, 70. The outward Acts and Exercises of *Mercy*, *ibid.* Endeavouring to prevent any Evils that may befall others, 70—3. And to ease and deliver them from any Evils already befall'n them, 73, 4. Contrary to all Rigour and Revenge, 71, 2. The greatest Instance of *Mercy*, 72, 3. 74. The present Blessedness naturally flowing from the Practice of the Duty, 74, 5. The Reward promised to the Practisers of it; they shall obtain *Mercy*, 75, 6. From Men, 76. From God in this World, *ibid.* And in the other World, 76—8. *Mercy* and Charity, how to be learnt easily, 84, 5, 6.

MERITS. The Unreasonableness of any one's Desire, that Rewards and Punishments should be distributed in this World according to every Man's *Merit*, 1039, 40. That things were distributed so, a prevailing Opinion formerly, and too generally received now, 1070. The Person that was born blind, *John ix.* a difficult Case for the Men of this Opinion to resolve, 1071. Upon what Principles they proceeded, *ibid.*

MESSIAH. See *Jesus*.

MINISTERS of God, how to be respected, 518. See *Faults*. Wicked Lives of some *Ministers*, not a sufficient Ground for separating from an established Church, 888. 919. Do not render their *Ministry* ineffectual, *ibid.* 917, 8. See *Fruits*. This Truth ought to be firmly believed, and well considered by us, 918, 9. The great Obligation that lies upon them boldly to speak the Truth, and rebuke Vice, 1057, 8. They ought to temper their Reproofs with Mildness, 1058.

MIRACLES, expecting to be maintained by *Miracles*, without our own Care and Industry, is vain and sinful, and a tempting of God, 675—7. See *Thought and Care*. *Miracles* justly required to prove Men divinely inspired, or sent by an extraordinary Mission from God, 872. 883—5. 1026. 1142—5. Yet all seeming *Miracles*, not a sufficient Proof in these Cases, 885, 6. The *Miracles* which our Saviour wrought, an Argument of his divine Mission, 1016—9. The ascribing them to the Power of the Devil was malicious, 1016, 7. And groundless, 1017, 8. The Devil, if he had the Power, would not use it to such a Design, 1017, 8. Nor is it credible that

God should permit him to do more and greater *Miracles* than any ever did, who were commission'd by himself, 1018, 9. Our Saviour's were such as every one present were capable of judging of, 981. Their being done in the Presence of many, is an Argument that none were imposed upon by their Senses, 982. The *Miracles* which the Apostles wrought, gave a great Assurance of the Truth of their Testimony, 1001. The Gift of Tongues, one of the most convincing, 1001, 2. *Miracles* not impossible to an Almighty Power, 1007, 8. Wherein consists the Nature of a *Miracle*, 1044. If it were common, it would cease to be look'd upon as such, 1044, 5. The many *Miracles* wrought by Christ and his Apostles before so many Witnesses, more convincing than if any single one were wrought before a Sceptick now, 1042. New *Miracles* without a proper Disposition of Mind would be ineffectual, 1044. This proved from Matter of Fact, and the Example of the *Jews* in our Saviour's Time, 1045—7.

MODESTY, A remarkable Instance of *St. Peter's*, 994.

MORAL Precepts to be obeyed before the Positive or Ceremonial, 185.

MORROW, What meant by *taking Thought for the Morrow*, and how and when it is sinful, 684, 5. 742, 3.

MOUNTAIN. See *Sermon*.

MOURNERS, That they should be *blest*, seems strange and incredible to the World, 23. The *Mourners*, whom our Lord pronounces *blest*, of two Sorts, 24. Either good Men *mourning* in Affliction, 24, 5. Or Penitents that rightly mourn for their Sins, 34. In due Season, 35. And in due manner, *ibid.* See *Sorrow*. Godly pious *Mourners* in Affliction *blest* at present, 26. Partly by their Sense of God's Goodness in afflicting them, 26, 7. Partly by the Comforts of God's Spirit under their Afflictions, 27. Lastly by the *blest* Effects of their Afflictions, *ibid.* which teach them Patience, 28. With Consideration and Amendment of their Ways, 28, 9. And Contempt of the World, 29, 30. The future Blessedness of such *Mourners*, 30, 1.

MOURNERS for Sin, their present Blessedness, even whilst they *mourn*, 36—8. Their future Blessedness in this Life, consisting in a good Hope of God's Mercy, 38, 9. And of escaping God's temporal Judgments, 39, 40. Their future Blessedness in another Life, 40, 1.

MOURNING.

the principal Matters, &c.

MOURNING. All Mourning for Sin does not entitle to Blessedness, 34, 5

MOUTH. The Meaning of that Phrase, *he opened his Mouth*, 4

MULTITUDE. See *Wicked*.

MURDER, what Christ forbids under that Notion, 230. See *Satisfaction*.

MURDERER, how punished by the Law of *Moses*, 220, 1

N.

NAME. To take God's Name in vain, what 302, 3

NAME of God in Scripture, most commonly put for God himself, 514, 5. in saying, *Hallowed be thy Name*, we both give Honour and Praise to God our selves, and pray that he may be honoured and glorified by others, 515—7. And oblige our selves to endeavour this may be done, 517. 1st, In our selves, *ibid*. Worshipping God constantly, especially in Publick, 517. And that in a due Manner, 517, 8. Treating with due Reverence all things relating to him, his House, his Days, his holy Word, his Ministers, 518. Carefully abstaining from dishonouring him in Word or Deed, 518, 9. 2^{dly}, We are obliged to do all we can that God may be honoured by others, 519. In order to this, we should first declare upon all Occasions God's glorious Attributes and wonderful Works, 519, 20. 2^{dly}, Be always ready to defend the Truth and Excellency of our Religion, 520. 3^{dly}, Set an eminently good Example, 520, 1

NECESSARIES for Life are not to be procured by Sin, tho' we were sure to perish for want of them, 683. See *Thought, Care, Bread*.

NEGLIGENCE in our worldly Concerns unlawful, 669, 70. See *Thought, Care*.

NEIGHBOUR, his Edification. See *Design*, what meant by *Neighbour* in the Law, 417, 8. What Love of our *Neighbour* commanded in the Law, 418, 9. Loving him as our self, what, 418. Our Lord makes all Men without Distinction our *Neighbours*, 421. Even Enemies, *ibid*.

NUMBER. See *Wicked*.

O.

OATH, what, 314. Whence proceeds the Credit which is given to it, 947, 8.

OATHS. All Oaths not forbidden in these Words, *Swear not at all*, 303, 304, &c. The true Design of these Words, 304, 307, 8. 309, 10. This Expression, though universal, may be taken in a limited Sense, 305—7. That it ought to be so understood, prov'd by several Arguments taken from the Context, 307. No express Prohibition is there found of the only proper Form of swearing, *by the Name and Majesty of God*, 307, 8. It is not said Oaths are evil, but that they come of evil, 308, 9. Lastly, the Prohibition of swearing is restrained to common Conversation, or light Matters, 309, 10. The same proved from Reason and Scripture, 312. Because Oaths are absolutely necessary for the Ends of Government and Justice, 312, 3. An Oath not morally evil in it self, but, rightly used, a good and religious Act, 314, 5. 322. Proved also from the Words used by the Prophets foretelling the Conversion of the Gentiles under the *Messias*, 315. And yet more strongly from some very great Examples; as of the primitive Christians, 316, 7. Of the Apostles, 317, 8. And of Christ himself, 318, 9. Christ forbids *Jewish* Abuses of Oaths, 321, 2. And chiefly swearing in common Conversation, 322. The Sinfulness and Folly of common Swearing, 322, &c.

OBEDIENCE. See *Father, Knowledge, Will of God, Lord, Lord*.

* OBEDIENCE to all God's Laws, without it the most excellent Gifts and Attainments, preaching, prophesying, and working of Miracles, signify nothing towards the procuring of Salvation, 911, 2

OBSCENITY. See *Pictures*.

OCCASIONAL Conformists, their Separation a sinful Schism, 926. 1064, 5. Their Plea, that they think some of the Rites and Ceremonies in our Church unnecessary, will not justify their Schism, 1065

OCCASIONS. See *Sins*. To cut off the Occasions of Sins most necessary and reasonable, 275—7. What we may not do to this End, particularly we may not destroy the whole Body, 277, 8. All Occasions of Sin impossible to be cut off at once, *ibid*. Nor disable our selves to do good, 278, 9. Nor sin in one kind, to cut off the Occasions of sinning in another, 279, 80. What Occasions of Sin distinguished into probable and necessary, 280. What may or ought to be

An Alphabetical INDEX of

be done as to the cutting off both these Sorts of *Occasions*, 282—5. Motives to this Duty, 286. To chuse the *Occasion* is to chuse the Sin, *ibid.* Easier to avoid the Temptation than to resist it, *ibid.* No Proportion between the Importance of those things that tempt us to Sin, and eternal Rewards and Punishments, 286, 7

To OFFEND, what, 277
OPINIONS. See *Doctrines*.

P.

PAIN. Not reasonable to live always in anxious Fear of *Pain*, 758

PAMPERING the Body, unlawful, 270

PAPISTS. What Ground to suspect they are false Prophets, 897, 8. Their Doctrine of Infallibility useles, 1054, 5. Their Boast, that their Church is at Unity within it self, without any Grounds, 1055. The Reason of our separating from them, *ibid.* The Vanity of their Argument drawn from the Number that are in Communion with their Church, 1056. Several Corruptions of their Church enumerated, 1066, 7

PARDON of Sin; the Conditions of it, 556—60. See *Trespases*. One of them, Repentance, 615

PARENTS. See *Faults*. Parents ought to breed their Children to Virtue early, 858. See *Education*.

St. PAUL. In the Dispute concerning Justification, St. Paul to be interpreted by St. James, not St. James by St. Paul, 1082. This upon several Accounts: 1st, Because there is express Testimony in Scripture, that in St. Paul's Writings there are some things hard to be understood, 1083. This appears likewise from common Observation, *ibid.* 2^{dly}, Because the Epistle of St. James was, as well as some others, wrote on purpose to rectify the Mistakes some had fallen into, by misunderstanding St. Paul's Epistles, 1083, 4. 3^{dly}, Because St. Paul's Words, taken in a literal Sense, would contradict the whole Design of the Gospel, 1084, 5. See *Justify, Faith, Works*. It was not the Design of any of his Epistles to comprehend the whole of Religion, 1090. But most of them were design'd to furnish the Christians to whom he wrote, with Answers to the Objections which the Enemies of Christianity made against it, *ibid.* He reasons against three sorts of Adversaries, the Gentiles, 1090, 1. the Jews, 1091, 2. and the Judaizing Christians, 1092

PEACE of Mind. Equity in our Dealings necessary to the obtaining it, 848

PEACE. What a private Man is to do to obtain or preserve the *Peace* of the World, and of the Catholick Church, 97, 8. Of the National Church to which he belongs, 99—101. Of the Civil State, 101—4. Among his Neighbours and Acquaintance, 111—3. It is our Duty to seek our own *Peace*, 115, 6. This best preserved by avoiding all provoking Actions, 116, 7. Particularly we must avoid and discourage Backbiting and Tale-bearing, 117, 8. Use no ill Language, or contemptuous Behaviour, 118. Nor needlessly contradict the Opinions, 118, 9. nor meddle in the Affairs of others, 119. *Peace*, when broken, how renewed, 119—21

PEACEFULNESS, wherein it consists, 89. is careful not to give Offence, 90. backward to take Offence, 90, 1. ready to be reconciled, 91, 2. uneasy to see others quarrel, 93. Contrary to this is Contentiousness, 94. and fomenting of Division and Contention, 94, 5

PEACE-MAKERS, who, 88, 9. Not to be blamed as Busy-bodies, 107—11. Their present Blessedness, 121. Their future Reward, 121—3

PEACE-MAKING, How this Duty may best be discharged, 97, &c. 111—3. Motives to it, 107. 113, 4. Objections against attempting it, 106, 7. answered, 107—11

PEARLS. To cast Pearls before Swine, what, 794, &c.

A PENNY. How much, 559

PEOPLE. See *Kings, Subjects*.

PERFECT. To be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, how our Duty, 439, &c. In what Sense possible, 441—5

PERFECTION, a very great one to love our Enemies, 423. 431. 437, 8. See *God's Perfections* under the Title *God*.

PERSECUTED, what it is to be persecuted, 125, 6. To be persecuted for Righteousness sake, and entitled to Blessedness, it is necessary both that our Sufferings be undeserved, 126, 7. That we suffer for the Profession or Practice of Christian Religion, 127—30. A Difficulty removed, 131—3. The present Blessedness of Persons so persecuted, consists in having their evil things in this Life, 135, 6. in the Honour done them by God, 136, 7. in Consolations from God, 137. in a satisfied Conscience, *ibid.* in Assurance that they are the Sons of God,

the principal Matters, &c.

God, 137, 8. in a good Hope of Heaven, 138. Their future Reward, having a promised certain Felicity, *ibid.* and of greater Felicity than others, 139, 40. Inferences from this Blessedness of theirs, 140, 1.

PERSECUTION for Righteousness sake, scarce to be avoided even in Christian Countries, 128—30. The patient enduring of it entitles to Blessedness, 131. Why some are called to it, and rewarded for it, and not others, 131—3. None of God's Promises of temporal Goods are to be understood, as promising Exemption from Persecution, 725. Though we are prepared to undergo Persecution, yet we are not imprudently to run into it, 802, 3. Persecution not agreeable to the Nature of the Gospel, 1059, 60.

Saint PETER dictated St. Mark's Gospel, 994. His Modesty discern'd in it, *ibid.* Probably first called to be an Apostle, *ibid.*

PHARISEES. The Scribes and Pharisees; who, and what they were, 203, 4. How highly esteemed by the Jews, 200. What led Christ to declare their Righteousness insufficient, 201—3. Their Righteousness, what, 204. greater than that of many wicked Christians, 204, 5. Wherein deficient, and to be exceeded by ours, 206, 7. Theirs was partial, ours must be universal, 206, 7. Theirs chiefly avoided Sins forbidden, ours must also perform the Duties commanded, 207, 8. Theirs regarded only the Letter of the Law, ours must observe the Letter, and the full Meaning of it, 210—4. Theirs only outward, ours must also be inward in the Heart, 214—6. Theirs acted by a wrong, ours must proceed upon a right Principle, 216, 7.

PICTURES exciting to Uncleaness, Plays, obscene Books, Poems, Songs, and Romances, which treat of wanton Love, and excite unchaste Behaviour, filthy Communication and Discourse, pampering the Body, are by Construction forbid by our Saviour, and to be avoided, 269, 70.

PITY. See *Compassionate Temper.*

PLACES, holy, how to be revered, 518.

PLAYS. See *Pictures.*

PLEASURES of Sin deceitful, 862, 3.

POLYGAMY, the Unlawfulness of it, 293—6.

POOR, uncharitable dealing with them, the Danger of it, 245, 6. See *Profuseness.*

Vol. II.

POOR. See *Charity to the Poor.*

POOR. What Blessedness belongs to the Poor, as such, 5. Poor, able to work, not to be maintain'd in Idleness, 7, 8. More Charity to maintain such in Work than in Idleness, 397. 1179, 80.

POOR in Spirit. By *Poor in Spirit*, not meant all Poor, 5, 6. nor *Romish Mendicants*, 6—8. nor the Meek and Peaceable, 8. The *Poor in Spirit* are both the humble and lowly in their own Minds, 9. And those who are of a Temper suitable to a State of Poverty, 12, &c.

POSSESSION, a good Title to an Estate till a better is shewn, 966. This Maxim made use of against those who deny the Books of Scripture to be wrote by the Persons whose Names they bear, without first shewing they have no Right to be fix'd to them *ibid.*

POVERTY. A voluntary Poverty not required of all Christians, 7. but rather condemned by Scripture, 7, 8. Virtues becoming a State of Poverty, and which that State naturally produces; as, 1st, Humility, 13. 2^{dly}, Patience, 14. 3^{dly}, Contentment with their Condition, 15. 4^{thly}, Trust and Hope in God, 16. 5^{thly}, Industry, Temperance, and Frugality, *ibid.* 6^{thly}, Contempt of the World, 18. 7^{thly}, A pitiful and compassionate Temper, 20. Poverty not very terrible, 757, 8.

POWER. See *King, Magistrate.* Two distinct independent Powers in the same Nation, no Absurdity, 1168. See *Church.*

PRAISE of Men for our good Works, not altogether unlawful to be desired, or delighted in, 449, 50. if done moderately, and with Submission to the Will of God, 451. But when we do well only for the Praise of Men, that is no Virtue, 451, 2. But extremely wicked to desire the Praise of Men in order to ill Purposes, 452. What seeking the Praise of Men, our Lord condemns, *ibid.* and why, 452—4. This Text how reconciled with, *Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works*, 454—6. See *Light, Design, Alms, Prayer, Fasting.* The Praise of Men vain and unprofitable in it self, 463. When the End of our Actions, deprives us of a most valuable Good, the Praise and Rewards of God, 463, 4. Praise of Men, but a sorry Comfort, when we know we do not deserve it,

To PRAY always, continually, without

An Alphabetical INDEX of

out ceasing, means at least that we should pray very often, 815. That we should make *Prayer* a Part of our Task and Business, *ibid.* That at least we should not neglect those Times and Seasons of *Prayer* which are set apart for it by divine or human Authority, such as the Lord's-Day, the Feasts and Fasts of the Church, &c, 816. And that we should also embrace all other fit Occasions of *Prayer*, *ibid.* That we should *pray* at least every Day, *ibid.* both in the Morning and in the Evening, 817. Or rather three times a Day, *ibid.* And that we should be always in a *praying* Temper, *ibid.* But such Precepts do not command us to spend our whole Time in *Prayer*, and do nothing else, *ibid.* We should our selves always endeavour for that which we *pray* to God for, 517. God's allowing us to *pray* to him, our great Privilege and Honour, 821, 2.

PRAYER vain and insignificant, without Obedience to God, 904, &c. 906. *Prayer*, or Petition, a Definition of it, 805. The Essence of it is an inward Desire of the Soul, 805, 6. No Man *prays* any longer than whilst he inwardly desires those things which he outwardly asks, *ibid.* The Subject Matter of *Prayer* is some good thing which we want, 806. It must be directed to God only as its Object, 503, 4. 806. To encourage our *Prayers*, we must believe that God is able to grant them, 806. *Prayer* is a Duty most reasonable in it self, 807, 8. and expressly commanded by God, 808, 9. *Publick Prayer* and *secret Prayer*, two distinct Duties, and both necessary, 809—11. *Publick Prayer* does most Honour to God, edifies our Neighbour, and is most certain of Success, 809, 10. *Prayer* must be fervent, 814. *Prayer* must be frequent and constant, 814—8. constant and importunate, *ibid.* If our *Prayers* be not always heard, this is caused by some Defect either in our selves, or in our *Prayers*, 819. Where there is no such Defect, our *Prayers* for temporal good things are granted, or something better than the particular thing we prayed for, 819—21. But then our *Prayers* for spiritual Blessings, particularly for God's Grace, will be granted in kind, 821.

PRAYER, all Parts of religious Worship comprehended under that Word, 470, 1. Our Saviour, *Matth.* vi. does not command it, but supposes it an acknowledged Duty, 469—71. The Wick-

edness and Folly of seeking the Praises of Men in our *Prayers*, 471, 2. and consequently of putting up Mens private single *Prayers* in publick Places, 472. Our Lord commands our private *Prayers* to be put up in the most secret manner that is possible, 472. 473, 4. but still requires publick *Prayer*, 472, 3. The Ends of Devotion not to be attained without secret *Prayer*, 474, 5. 810, 1. Secret *Prayer* proceeds from, and improves our Belief of God's Omniscience, 475. 811. Nothing can justly excuse the Omission, nor hinder the Use of it, 475, 6. It yields us the greatest Comfort, by assuring us of our Sincerity, 476, 7. 811. and of our Reward, both by God's Promise, 477. and by its own proper Tendency, 477, 8. God's Goodness and Knowledge of our Needs before we ask, does not render *Prayer* needless, because God commands us to pray, 488. And *Prayer* makes us sensible of our Wants, and our Dependence upon God for the Supply of them, 488. Is a Means of working in us those good Dispositions which fit us to receive the things we desire, 489. And it is an actual Exercise of many Virtues, *ibid.*

Set Forms of *PRAYER* are not unlawful, 492. See *Repetition*. They who separate from the Church for her using a Form of *Prayer*, would have separated from the *Apostles*, who prayed by a Form, 493, 4. Three Objections against a Form of *Prayer* answered: 1st, That a Form of *Prayer* cannot be suited to all Occasions, 494, 5. 2^{dly}. That a set Form is a stinting of the Spirit, 495—7. 3^{dly}. That praying by a Form is contrary to that praying by the Spirit, which is most pleasing to God, 497, 8.

Our Lord's *PRAYER* twice deliver'd, upon two Occasions, 490, 1. Design'd both for a Pattern, 492, and for a Form of *Prayer*, *ibid.* Lord's *Prayer*, its Matter full, comprehending all things needful for our selves or others, 498, 9. Neither Matter nor Words new, but taken mostly from the Forms used by the *Jews*, 499. Its running in the Plural Number shews it was chiefly to be used in publick, 500. and extends our good Wishes to others, when we use it alone, *ibid.* The Order of the Petitions teaches us to prefer God's Glory before our own Occasions, 500, 1. Three principal Parts of the Lord's *Prayer*, the Preface, the Petitions, and the Conclusion, 502. What is to be learnt from the

the principal Matters, &c.

Preface to the *Lord's Prayer*, 503, &c. *Lord's Prayer* contains every thing that can be reckoned a Part of *Prayer*, 622, 3. is both an Expression of our Devotion towards God, and an Instruction and Incitement to our selves, 623. A wicked Man continuing in his Wickedness cannot say any one Sentence of our *Lord's Prayer* with true attentive Devotion, 624, 5. A good Man attentively and devoutly using it, must be made better by it, both by its natural Tendency and the divine Blessing, 625, 6.

PRAYER by the Spirit, as understood by the Dissenters, not commanded in Scripture, 497, 8. *Prayer* in or with the Spirit, as practicable when we pray by a Form, as when we pray extempore, 498. The Spirit of God given in *Prayer*, to what End, 496, 498. Success of our *Prayers*, what Assurance given us of it, 824, &c. Particularly, because God is more truly our Father even than our earthly Parents, who yet will not deny their Children any reasonable Request, 825—7. Because God knows the Wants of his Children, and how to supply them better than any Man does, and so often actually grants our *Prayers*, by giving us what he knows is best for us, though not the particular thing we ask, 827. Because God has infinitely more Power, 828. and infinitely more Goodness than any earthly Parent, 828, 9. See *Father*. Comfortable Inferences from God's being represented as so gracious a Father, 833, &c.

PRIESTS. See *Church*.

PRINCES. See *Kings*.

PRIVILEGES of Church-Membership, &c. not to be presumed upon, 908, 9.

PROFESSION of Christianity without believing it, and living answerably to our Belief, not sufficient to Salvation, 902, 3.

PROFUSENESS, no Excuse for not giving Alms, 398. 1180.

PROMISES of the Law, how to be understood, 57.

PROMISES temporal, are made only for so long Time as God sees fit to continue them, 724, 5. And with an Exception of the Case of Persecution, 725, 6.

PROPHECY. Our Saviour's *prophecy*, a Mark of his Mission, 1014—6. That there have been some who have foretold future Contingences, tho' not sent from God, is no Argument to the contrary of this, 1015, 6. The Difference between them, *ibid*. A proper

Proof of divine Inspiration, 1141, 2. What Cautions are required in admitting any Man's *Prophecy*, as a Mark of his being a true Prophet, 1146.

PROPHETS and false *Prophets*, who, 870, 1. False *Prophets* arose very early in the Christian Church, 1136. That there should come some in the latter Ages expressly foretold, 1137. The false *Prophets* our Lord warns us to beware of, either such as take upon them to be Teachers without Commission from God, either ordinary or extraordinary, or else such as work false Miracles, and teach false Doctrine, 883—6. We must first and chiefly beware not to be misled by such into any hurtful Error or sinful Practice, 871, 2. 2dly, We must use our best Skill to discern between true and false *Prophets*, 872. Rejecting Pretences to Inspiration, unless confirmed by Miracles and pure Doctrine, worthy of God, *ibid*. 883, 4. 1138, 9. See *Miracles*. And refusing to hear all such as are not warranted to teach by a regular Commission, or the extraordinary Power of Miracles, 872. 885. 3dly, Avoiding all such as by any of these Means are discerned to be false *Prophets*, 872. The various Methods they have used of seducing, 1137. Two of their Methods of Deceit we shall always be in Danger of; false Interpretation of Scripture, and Pretences to Inspiration, 1137. How to guard against the former, *ibid*. Two Proofs especially to be insisted on, by which *Prophets* should prove their divine Mission, Prophecy, 1141, 2, &c, and Miracles, 1142. That *Prophet* that preaches only the same Doctrine which we have already received, needs no new Inspiration, 1143. If his Doctrine is pretended to be a farther Explication of what is already contain'd in Scripture, what Proof of his Mission is then to be required, 1144, 5. Several Marks to be observed in the Predictions of a *Prophet*, 1146, 7. In his Miracles, 1147. In his Doctrine, 1148. We must beware of false *Prophets*, because of the Danger of being deluded by them, by their fair Shew and Sheeps Cloathing, 873. and because of the miserable Consequences of being deceived in, and deluded by, such false *Prophets*, 873. The being made a Prey of, 874. and misled to our eternal Ruine, *ibid*. The Warnings given us, will render us inexcusable, if misled, *ibid*. What sort of Caution requisite, 1138—41. Why God permits false *Prophets*,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

Prophets, 874, 5. 1018. How far he permits them, *ibid.* Means to be secured against the Seduction of false *Prophets* are, 1st, To accept those only for Teachers, who are lawfully called and ordained to that Office by the Governors of the Church, of which we were born Members, 875—8. One Exception to this Rule, *viz.* when the publick Doctrine of such a Church, subscribed by its Ministers, is wicked and corrupt, plainly contrary to Reason and Scripture, 875. In all other Cases this Rule most prudent and safe, 876—8. This Rule does not recommend a blind Obedience or implicit Faith, 878. 2^{dly}, To examine the Doctrines, even of our lawful Teachers, by the Word of God, 878, 9. For false *Prophets* may creep in amongst those who are lawfully ordained, 886. 3^{dly}, To seek the Truth sincerely, and practise religiously whatever we are persuaded is our Duty, 879. 4^{thly}, Constant and earnest Prayer to God, that his Spirit may enable us to distinguish between Truth and Error, and that the Deceits of false *Prophets* may be laid open, and that he would grant his Church faithful and able Ministers, 879, 80. What those Fruits are by which false *Prophets* may be discerned from true ones. See *Fruits*. We may justly suspect those to be false *Prophets*, who will not submit their Doctrines to be examined by Reason or Scripture, such as *Quakers* and *Papists*, 897, 8. and who teach that Holiness is unnecessary, 179. 180. 198. See *Law*.

PROSPERITY. See *Gifts of God*.

PROVERBS, sufficient that they be true for the most part, 659

PRUDENCE to be used in all those Methods we take to reform others, 799—801. See *Temper*.

PRUDENT Caution to be used in the publick Profession and Exercise of our Religion in general, 802, 3

PUBLICANS, who, 430

PURE in Heart, who, 79

PURITY in Heart, defiled by such Thoughts as are evil in themselves, 79, 80. Those are such as are contrary to Piety, 80. to Justice or Charity, *ibid.* or to Sobriety, *ibid.* And by such Thoughts as are evil, because relating to, or tending to produce sinful Actions, *ibid.* Such as foolish Imaginations, 81, 2. or Consentings of the Will to Sin, 82. or to the Means of Sin, 82, 3. *Purity* in Heart how preserved, 83, 4. Its present Blessedness, *viz.* Virtue made ea-

sy, 84, 5. and Peace of Conscience, 85. Its future Reward, the Sight of God, 85—7. *Purity* of Heart necessary, 215, 6

Q.

QUAKERS, 303. 897

QUARREL, how a peaceful Person should act when engaged in one, 119—21

QUEEN. An Elogium upon the late Queen, 1134

R.

RACA, What sinful Behaviour meant by saying *Raca*, 228, 9

READINGS. See *Various*.

REASON must be truly attended to in discerning between Good and Evil, 655, 6. in judging the Fruits of Doctrines, 894

REBELLION. See *Princes*.

RECONCILIATION, most honourable to seek it first, 91—3

REFORMATION, Zeal for the Reformation of others, in Persons that allow themselves in Sin, is not the Effect of true Religion, 787. See *Prudence*.

RELIGION, We should be always ready to defend the Truth and Excellency of it, 520. *Religion* does not consist only in Exercises of Devotion, 677. 732. See *Care*. Many Duties of *Religion* tend to promote or secure our temporal Interest, 735. There are no Duties of *Religion*, the Practice whereof naturally tends to bring us to Want, 735, 6. Neither the religious Exercises of Prayer, &c. which take up some of our Time, 736. nor the strict Observation of Justice in our Dealings, which hinders some sorts of Gain, 736, 7. nor liberal Alms, 737. For, 1st, No Man is obliged to give away more than he can spare, unless in extraordinary Cases, *ibid.* 2^{dly}, A Man may give away a great deal, and yet not be the poorer for it, 737, 8. 3^{dly}, Almsgiving never makes Men miserably poor, but often to thrive much better than others, 738. All Men tenacious of the *Religion* they are brought up in, 987, 8. Not for the Interest of the Infidel even in this World to laugh at *Religion*, 1048. At least it ought to be treated with a decent Reverence, 1049. For the Interest of Society in general, that there should be such a thing, 1049, 50

RELIGIOUS Life, the two great Impediments of it, its Difficulty and Singularity, 2

the principal Matters, &c.

larity, 851. Not so difficult as to be impossible, 853, 4. See *wicked Life*. How far difficult and singular, 854, 5. The first Beginning of a *religious* Life commonly attended with great Difficulties, 855. But these greater to some than others, 855, 6. But never so great as reasonably to discourage any from entering upon it, 856. Continuance in a *religious* Life also is difficult, by reason of our corrupt Inclinations by Nature, evil Customs, and great Discouragements from without, 856, 7. Because it is a strait small Path, out of which 'tis very easy to step aside without the utmost Prudence and Watchfulness, 857. And because every stepping aside is a great Stop and Hindrance to us, *ibid.* And because much Patience is necessary that we may persevere to the End, *ibid.* The great Difficulty of a *religious* Life should make us undertake it with a strong Resolution to overcome and persevere, 859. Difficulty no just Discouragement from a *religious* Life, considering it will surely bring us to Heaven at last, 866. Nor Lonesomeness, it being better to be happy alone, than miserable in much Company, 866, 7.

REPENTANCE, what true, what not, 231, 2. 246, 7. Necessary for the Acceptance of our religious Worship, 243, &c. See *Satisfaction*.

REPENTANCE, timely, Motives to it; lest our Sins come under God's just and strict Judgment, 258, 9. And lest we be cast into Prison, *i. e.* into Hell, 259, 60. And there suffer endless Punishments, 260. *Repentance*, the Mischief and Danger of delaying it, 254—7. 260, 1. 858. Because the present Opportunity of doing it may be the last, 261, 2. And all Delay of *Repentance* increases the Difficulty of it, 262, 3. And till we have agreed with our Adversary, we are always at his Mercy, 263, 4. *Repentance* a necessary Condition of obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, 457, 8. 615. See *Trefpasses*. Death-bed *Repentance*, the Danger of it, 858. 909, 10. We have more and stronger Motives to *Repentance* than the *Jews* before our Saviour's Time had, 940, 1.

REPROACHES of wicked Men a most dangerous Persecution, 129, 30. See *Language*.

REPROBATION absolute, confuted by what our Saviour says, that God is an infinitely wise and good Father to all Mankind, 833—5. And by other Texts

VOL. II.

of Scripture,

834
REPROOF every Man's Duty, upon Occasion, to give it, and therefore necessary for every one to be unreprouvable himself, 790, 1. See *Faults*. *Reproof*, we are not to bestow it where we are satisfied it will do no good to the Persons reproofed, but provoke them to hurt us, 794—9. This Caution not inconsistent with those Precepts, which seem to forbid our despairing of any Man's Repentance, 798. The private Sins of yet modest Sinners require a private *Reproof*, 799, 801. Publick Sins a publick *Reproof*, *ibid.*

REPETITIONS, vain *Repetitions*, what, 479. A Fault the Heathens were guilty of, who used to spend much Time in saying over and over again the same Words, 480. And which our Saviour himself calls *much Speaking*, *ibid.* Occasioned by wrong Notions of God and Providence, 480, 1. And can scarce be committed by those, who believe God regards them as a gracious Father, and knows their Needs before they ask, 481, 2. In forbidding vain *Repetitions*, our Saviour did not forbid all long Prayers, 482, 3. Nor putting up very frequently the same Requests to God, 483. Nor using the same Words, when we repeat the same Petitions, 483, 4. 499, 500. Nor expressing the same Sense by the same Words more than once in the same Prayer, or Office of Prayer, 484, 5. 486, 7. But our Lord condemns, as *much Speaking*, the continuing our Prayers to a certain Length, whether our Devotion continues so long or no, 485. And when we are too particular in our Petitions for earthly Blessings, 485, 6. And too much study for rhetorical Expressions, as if we thought to move God by our Eloquence, 486. And extravagant ridiculous Tautologies, such as the Heathens used formerly, and the Papists now, 486, 7. The *Repetition* of the *Lord's Prayer* and *Gloria Patri*, in our Liturgy, not condemn'd by our Saviour's Rule, 487, 8.

REPUTATION, A good one represented in Scripture as desirable, 449, 50. As God's Gift, 450. And proposed as Part of the Reward of good Actions, *ibid.*

RESIST *not Evil*, Matth. v. 39. How to be understood, 345, &c.

RESTITUTION. See *Satisfaction*.

RESURRECTION of our Saviour, was what the Witnesses of it might rather be more certain of, than of any other of his Miracles,

An Alphabetical INDEX of

Miracles, 981, 2. Almost all their Senses might judge of it, *ibid.* The concurrent Testimony of a great many Witnesses, a farther Confirmation of it, 982. Though our Lord's *Resurrection* was positively attested by none but his Friends and Disciples, yet is it sufficiently testified, 986, 7.

REVELATION, The Arguments for the Sufficiency of a standing one, stronger to us than to the *Jews* before our Saviour's coming, 940, 1. The Possibility of such a *Revelation* as might be a complete Rule for the Faith and Practice of all future Ages, without needing any Addition, proved from the infinite Wisdom and Power of God, 942, 3. 944. Nor is it unconceivable; because a *Revelation* once given, nothing more is required than a proper Use of Reason in understanding it, and drawing just Consequences from it, 943. The Necessity human Lawgivers are under of altering their Laws, no Objection to this, 943, 4. A *Revelation* may be sufficiently attested to be written by the Person whose Name it bears, tho' there are no Eye-witnesses of his writing it, 945, 6. See *Credibility*. Very possible that the Person to whom a *Revelation* is made, should have sufficient Evidence that it proceeds from God, 948, 9. To suppose the contrary makes God of less Power and Skill than Men, who can express their Minds in such a Manner as to be understood by each other, 949. The several Pretences to *Revelations* no Argument against the Certainty of real ones, 949, 50. The Possibility of a standing *Revelation* makes it probable that there is one, 950, 1. If there is one, it may be strongly presumed it is that contained in the Holy Scripture, 951. See *Scriptures*. When the Divinity of a *Revelation* is once fully confirmed, it is unreasonable to expect any other Proof of it, 1026—8. This illustrated by the Example of human Laws, 1027, 8. A new *Revelation* unreasonable, as it would destroy the Excellency of our Faith, 1028, 9. And from the Inconveniencies and Absurdities of it, 1033, 4. It would be fruitless in a great Measure, 1034. The Folly of rejecting a *Revelation* in which our greatest Interest is concerned, 1034—6.

REVENGE, what, 44. See *Mercy*. In what Sense allowed the *Jews*, 344. *Eye for Eye*, &c. No Law for private Men but for Magistrates only, *ibid.* This Law was given to deter Men from doing

Injuries, not to gratify private *Revenge*, 344, 5. Only as they might claim of the Judges the Execution of this Law, 345. But Christ continuing to Magistrates the legal Power of punishing Injuries, 346, 7. forbids in general private Persons to *return Evil for Evil*, 345, 6. especially *revenging* themselves with their own Hands, 347. And even malicious legal Prosecutions, wherein our Damage is not repaired, but our Adversary only suffers, 347, 8. Except where the Law of our Country requires us to prosecute the Offender, 348, 9. And where a Man prosecutes the Offender, not out of *Revenge* but Charity to the Publick, 349. *revenging* one Wrong to prevent more, not justifiable, 349. 353. which is true in very great, as well as in smaller Injuries, such as *smiting the Cheek*, &c. 357. For Christ forbade *Revenge* in all those Cases wherein the Law allowed it, which comprehended the greatest Injuries, *ibid.* And our Lord's own Practice proves the same, who did not return the greatest Injuries, 357,—9. and who designed in the Instances mentioned by him to enlarge, not restrain, the Precept of forbearing *Revenge*, 359. and even the Injuries our Lord instances in, may in some Circumstances be very great ones, 359—61. Great Difference between *Revenge* and Punishment, 361, 2. The Precept forbidding *Revenge* makes way for that which requires us to *love our Enemies*, 416.

REVERENCE both inward and outward, necessary in religious Worship, 506, 7.

RICHES, not unlawful to possess them, 640, 1. Nor all Desire and Endeavour to get them, 641. See *Treasures*, *Mammon*, *worldly Goods*.

RIGHT EYE, RIGHT HAND, our Lord's Command to pluck out the one, and cut off the other, not to be literally understood, 278, 9.

RIGHTEOUSNESS. See *Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*. *Righteousness* two-fold, either actual, or imputed, 61, 2. How certainly to be obtained, 65—7. Perfect only in Heaven, 66. See *Pharisees*. *Righteousness* of God, what, 701. To seek it, what, *ibid.* To seek it first, signifies both being righteous betimes, 702. and making Religion our chief Concern, 703. The Necessity and Reasonableness of this, *ibid.* &c. See *Care*.

RIGOUR See *Mercy*.

ROCK,

the principal Matters, &c.

ROCK, What is meant by a Man's building his House upon a Rock, 923

ROMISH Church. See *Papists*.

S.

SABBATH Christian, what, 214. He keeps the Sabbath best who does most good upon it, 784, 5

The **SACRAMENTS** of the Gospel not to be offered, nor administer'd to those who despise them as insignificant Ceremonies, 802

Thou hast SAID, the Meaning of that Expression, 318

SAINTS departed, not the Object of Prayer, 503, 4

SALT. All Christians compared to it, 143—6. The Fitness of, and Duties arising from, this Comparison, 146, 7. The Reasonableness of discharging those Duties, 147. The Punishment of omitting them, 147, 8

SALVATION. See *Assurance*.

SAND, what is meant by a Man's building his House upon the Sand, 923, 4

SANHEDRIM. See *Council*.

SATISFACTION to be made for all Injuries, 236, 7. Particularly in Case of Murder, 237. of wounding, maiming or disfiguring any Person, 237, 8. of reproaching and reviling Language, 238. of Slander, 238, 9. of Wrong done our Neighbour in his Estate, Money, or Goods, 239, 40. What must be done by him that is unable to make *Satisfaction*, 240, 1. *Satisfaction* necessary to our being pardoned by God, or his accepting our religious Worship, 243, 4. This plain from Scripture, and particularly as to Sacrifices, 244, 5. Prayers, 245. Fasting, 245, 6. The same thing clear from Reason, especially as to Prayer for Pardon, 246—8. This no Excuse for neglecting the Worship of God, 249, 50. *Satisfaction* ought to be made speedily, 246, 7. 249. 255, &c. All this a powerful Dissuasive from Injustice, 250, 1

SCANDAL, what, 277

SCHISMS. See *Divisions*. Cannot be prevented by Infallibility it self, 1054, 5. *Schisms* in a Church, no Objection against it, 1055. 1066. It is not the smaller Party which is always guilty of the *Schism*, 1055, 6. *Schism* is not excused by Toleration, and Grant of Liberty of Conscience, 1060—2

SCRIBES. See *Pharisees*.

SCRIBES who, 933. Their manner of Teaching, what, 933, 4. Not blame-

able for not assuming a greater Authority than God had given them, 934. The Difference between Christ's Teaching and theirs consisted, 1st, In the Matter of his Doctrine; he speaking of the substantial Duties of Piety, Justice and Mercy; they chiefly of Rites and Ceremonies, 434, 5. 2^{dly}, In the Manner of his Teaching, which was with a far greater Authority than that of the *Scribes*, 435, 6. 3^{dly}, In the Proof which Christ gave of his Authority to teach in such Manner as he did; and this he had done before his preaching, by working Miracles, 936

SCRIPTURE a bright and true Light for the Discovery of Good and Evil, 656. 854, 5. 878. See *Word of God*.

Holy SCRIPTURE is a sufficient standing Revelation, as to the Matter contained in it, *953—7. 1139. It contains sufficient Directions for our Practice, 953. The Supposition that several Books which were writ by the Apostles are now lost, is neither an Argument that they were useless, 954, 5. or that these now remaining, are not sufficient, 956, 7. A probable Reason, why God suffered those to be lost, which are supposed to be so, 957. That all those Books are preserved which are necessary for Mens Salvation, argued farther from God's Providence and Love to Mankind, 957. And from his Justice, *ibid*. Unreasonable for Infidels to object the Insufficiency of *Scripture* in this respect, 953. 957. 1044. 1048. The *Scripture* proposes Motives sufficient to persuade Men to do what it requires, 958, 9. 1039. We have sufficient Reason to believe that the Books of *Holy Scripture* were written by those Persons who are said to be the Authors of them, 966. It lies upon those who deny it, to disprove it, *ibid*. The universal Reception of the Books of *Scripture*, and that too from their first Publication, a Proof of their being genuine, 967, 8. There is as good Proof of this, as we can have of a Matter of such a Nature, 968. 977. 1042. The Absurdity of the Infidel's arguing, that the *Scripture may be* all Fiction, 969, 700. The true Reasons of his doubting of its Authority, is because he cannot comply with the Strictness of its Precepts, 970. The Authors of some particular Books of *Scripture* being not certainly known, is no Argument against the Authority of those Books, 971, 2. No more is that which is drawn from some

An Alphabetical INDEX of

some Book of *Scripture* being rejected by particular Sects of Men, 972. Nor that which is drawn from others being not universally receiv'd in the most early Times, 972—4. Whence it happen'd, that some Books at first were not universally receiv'd, 973. This Objection strengthens the Proof of the Authority of the once controverted Books, and is a corroborating Evidence of the Authority of all the others, 973. The Objection, that among the several counterfeited *Gospels* and *Epistles* which were published in the early Times of Christianity, some of them may have possibly slipt into the Canon, answer'd, 974. Objected that the Copies which we now have, are depraved by the Transcribers, 974, 5. To suppose this, invalidates the Credit of all History, 975. The Impossibility of having all the Copies corrupted, 975, 6. The small Differences in the Copies, no Hindrance to the understanding the *Scripture*, 976. The Providence of God concern'd in preserving the Books free from Corruption, *ibid.* See *History*. What Obligation lies upon us to read the *Scriptures*, 1051, 2.

SECURITY, or a Belief that our Prosperity cannot be changed, no Duty, 744. For, 1st, Such *Security* is ungrounded, *ibid.* 2^{dly}, It is a Fault we are warned against in Scripture, 754, 5. 3^{dly}, It has often provoked God to convince the *Secure* of their Folly by his Judgments, 745. 4^{thly}, It is apt to render any Change for the worse very grievous and intolerable, *ibid.* The contrary very advisable, 745, 6.

SELF-DEFENCE not forbidden by the Precept, *Resist not Evil*, 367, 8. Cautions to be observed in the Use of this Permission, 368—70. Yet more Christian to suffer Loss, than hurt another, 370.

SELF-LOVE, How to rid our selves of the Prejudices occasioned by it, and render it useful, in discerning our Duty to our Neighbour, 842, 3. 847.

SENSE. The Evidence of it much stronger when several agree in the same Testimony, 982. See *History*. The only Security that our *Senses* do not deceive us is the Goodness of God, 1020. The Evidence of *Sense* which they had who lived in the Apostles Days, was not more apt to convince than the Proof which we have now, 1032, 3.

SEPARATION. See *Ministers*, *Divisions*.

SERMON. Our Lord's should be com-

mitted to Memory, 1. Why delivered on a Mountain, 2. Why delivered by him sitting, *ibid.* obliges not only the Clergy, but all Christians, 3, 4. 143—6. That in St. *Luke* not certainly the same with that in St. *Matthew*, 6. That on the Mount not only corrects the false Interpretations which the *Pharisees* had put upon the Law, but commands many things wholly new, 420. See *Effects*.

SERVANTS and Day-Labourers may make Religion their chief Care, without neglecting their Business, 733, 4.

SEVERITY. See *Imprudent*.

SHAME. We ought not to be ashamed of owning the good Principles we act upon, 155—7. A young or modest Sinner not to be put to open *Shame*, lest he become thereby *shameless* and incorrigible, 799—801. The proper Method of treating such, 800, 1.

The SHEEP's Cloathing of false Prophets commonly consists in extraordinary Appearances of Sanctity and Devotion, 873. In Expressions of a more flaming Zeal for their Religion and bad Cause, than the best of Men use for the Truth of the Gospel, *ibid.* To which they add the *Sheep's* Voice, *i. e.* fair Words, *ibid.*

SIN. No *Sins*, that we know and allow our selves in, so small as to be venial, 193, 4. Yet those Protestants seem to believe the Popish Doctrine of *Venial Sins*, who live easy in some plain Breaches of Duty, 194, 5. Not sufficient for him to plead they have but one Fault, 195, 6. and that but a small one, 196, 7. The Guilt and Danger of being accessory to the *Sins* of others, 197, 8. He consents to the *Sin*, who consents to the Temptation, 271, 2. The best way to avoid any *Sin*, is to avoid the Temptations and Occasions leading to it, 272—4.

SINS, why called *Debts* in Scripture, 553. *Sins*, *Debts*, *Trespases*, sometimes signify the same Thing, *ibid.* See *Trespases*.

SINNER modest. See *Shame*.

SINCERITY exercised and proved by secret Alms, 459—61. 464, 5. And secret Prayer, 467.

SINGULARITY. See *Imprudent*.

SITTING, the usual Posture of those who taught among the *Jews*, 2.

SLANDER. See *Satisfaction*.

The SOLDIERS Employment, not unlawful, 373, 4.

A SOLITARY, or too retired Life, to be

the principal Matters, &c.

be avoided, 153, 4. For whom convenient, 154

SORROW. Godly *Sorrow* for Sin, its Properties: 1st, It perfectly hates the Sins it mourns for, 35, 6. 2^{dly}, It works an Amendment of Life, 36. The Reasonableness and Blessedness of it. See *Mourners for Sin.*

SOUL. The Care of it how necessary and reasonable, 703—8. See *Care.* The Soul is the Man, 712, 3

SPIRIT. See *Divisions.* Does not in Scripture signify Will or Choice, 7. often signifies Height or Greatness of Mind, 9

SPIRIT of God. See *Prayer by the Spirit.*

STRONG Crying in Prayer, is not praying with a loud Voice, but with a fervent Devotion, 814

SUBJECTS, their Duty to Governors, 1122, 3. 1172. that is, to the supreme Legislative Power, in what Hands soever it be placed, 1123. See *King, Change.*

SUCCESS. See *Prayer, Gifts of God.*

SUFFERINGS of good Men, the Atheist's Objection against Providence, drawn from them, answer'd, 140, 1. An Argument for a future Judgment, 141. The *Sufferings* of good Men are not always inflicted for the Punishment of their Sin, proved from the Example of *Job*, 1072, 3. and *King Charles* the Martyr, 1074, 5. Two Ends of Providence which are always design'd in all the *Sufferings* of good Men: 1st, Their spiritual Improvement in Grace and Virtue, 1075, 6. 2^{dly}, The Benefit of others, 1077, 8. See *Judgments temporal.*

The **SUN**, All Christians compared to it, 143, 4. See *Light of the World.*

ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΝ, What, 221, 2

SUPPER of the Lord ought to be celebrated, 212, 3

SWEAR not at all, &c. All Oaths not forbidden in those Words, 303, &c.

SWEARING, Why expressed by taking the Name of God in vain, 211. The Sinfulness and Folly of Common *Swearing*, shewn first from the Nature of the Sin it self, whether an Oath be considered as an Act of Worship, 322, 3. Or as a calling God to be a Witness of our Truth, and a Judge of our Sincerity, 323—5. The Guilt and Folly of it, as to some Circumstances always attending it, 325. As that it immediately affronts the Person and Majesty of God, *ibid.* As it is a Sin we may easily avoid, and have no Temptation to, 325—7. And as it

Vol. II.

is an open, scandalous Sin, of very ill Example, 327, 8. As it produces the worst Effects, 328. Begetting in Men a Readiness to commit all other Sins, *ibid.* Betraying them that use it into Perjury, 328, 9. Even solemn and deliberate Perjury, when they can get by it, 329. Pernicious to Government and civil Society, 329, 30. Its Genteelness and Commonness but vain Pleas for this Sin, 331, 2. Not excused by the foolish Conceit some have, that it commands Respect, 333. Nor by doing it to avoid being thought precise or religious, 333, 4. Nor by doing it to gain Credit to our Words, 334, 5. Nor by Mens mincing or disguising their Oaths, 335, 6. Nor by using such Words as it is uncertain whether they be Oaths or not, 336. Nor by avoiding to *swear* by the Name of God, and using other less Oaths, 336, 7. Nor by Habit or Custom, 337—9. To keep from common *Swearing*: 1st, Always speak Truth, even in the smallest Matters, 339, 40. 2^{dly}, Seldom or never use vehement Asseverations, 340. To cure the Habit of *Swearing*, 1st, Consider the Sin, Folly and Danger of it, *ibid.* 2^{dly}, Be very watchful over your selves, *ibid.* 3^{dly}, Avoid Passion and Intemperance, 340, 1. 4^{thly}, Have a Friend to admonish you, 341. 5^{thly}, Reprove others for this Fault, *ibid.* Punish your self as often as guilty of it, *ibid.* Lastly, Add Prayer, 341, 2

SWINE who meant by that Word, *Matth.* vii. 6. 795. Such Persons not to be admonished, but excommunicated or avoided, 795, 6. All Sinners not to be thus treated, 799—801

T.

TALE-BEARING. See *Backbiting.*

A **TALENT** what, 559. marg. the Proportion between 10000 *Talents* and 100 Pence, 560. marg.

TEACHING, What kind of Teaching the Duty of all, 199

The **TEMPER** of the Persons we deal with, to be prudently considered in all Cases wherein Religion is concerned, 802

TEMPERANCE. See *Industry.* how necessary for Christians, 163, 4

TEMPT. See *Miracles.*

TEMPTATION. See *Sin, Occasions of Sin.* *Temptation* properly signifies only a Trial or Experiment, such as God sometimes makes of good Men, and such

An Alphabetical INDEX of

as all Circumstances of Life may prove to us, 609, 10. Against such *Temptations* as these we ought not to pray, 610. Sometimes it signifies a prevailing Inducement to Sin, laid before us by the Devil, *ibid.* God never *tempts* us in this Sense, 610, 1. yet God may be said to lead us into *Temptation*, when he permits the Devil to *tempt* and overcome us, 611. This he has promised not to permit, *ibid.* But he has made Prayer a Condition of receiving the Benefit of of this Promise, *ibid.* Having forfeited God's Grace, so often by our Sins, we ought to beg it as a Favour, 611, 2. To pray, *lead us not into Temptation*, i. e. either that God would remove all dangerous *Temptations*, or give us Strength sufficient to overcome them, 711, 3. in proportion to the Weakness of our Nature increased by evil Customs, 612. As we pray, that we may not be led into *Temptation*, we should not run our selves into it, but avoid it, 613, 4. Fore-arm our selves, watch against, and resist it, 614. Firmly resolve, and sincerely endeavour to reform our Lives, that we may obtain Pardon and Grace, 615. Strong *Temptations* distinguish true Christians from Hypocrites, 924—7

TERTULLIAN his Testimony, that there were some Parts of Scripture of the Apostles own Writing, remaining in his Time, 975

TESTAMENT NEW. The Genuine-ness of the Books of it. See *Scripture*.

TESTIMONY. A written *Testimony* often as credible as a living one, 977. The concurrent *Testimony* of several Apostles, *written*, is an Advantage to us, which they who lived in the Apostles had not, *ibid.* 1029. Upon what Accounts the *Testimony* of our Saviour concerning himself was credible, 1010—12. He that will reject the *Testimony* we have for the Truth of our Religion, would reject any, 1033, 4

THOUGHT, taking *Thought*, what implied by it, 672—7. Not Diligence and Labour, but Solitude and Anxiety, 672. The original word signifies such a *Thoughtfulness* as distracts the Mind, and takes it off from proper Objects, *ibid.* This Exposition confirmed by a Parallel Text, 672, 3. and by some other Texts of Scripture, wherein the Nature of blameable worldly Care is more plainly expressed, 673, 4. A diligent *Thought* or Care for a Maintenance is commanded in several Places in Scripture, 674, 5. This Care necessary

to preserve Life, without which we cannot seek the Kingdom of God, 675—7. In taking honest Care to provide for his Family, a Man is working out his Salvation, 677. What *Thoughtfulness* is forbidden, 680, &c. See *Care, Morrow*.

THOUGHTS evil. See *Pure in Heart*.

THOUGHTFULNESS, what sort is forbidden, 680, &c. See *Care, Morrow*.

THOUGHTFULNESS for the Morrow. See *Anxiety*.

THOUGHTLESSNESS. See *Inconsideration*.

TIMES holy, how to be kept, 518

TOLAND, his Impudence in denying King Charles his Title to *Εικὼν Βασιλική*, and the Apostles theirs to several of their Writings, 1066, 7

TOLERATION, the Meaning of the Word, 1061. See *Schism*.

TOLERATION is no Excuse for Schism, 1060—2

TONGUES. See *Reproaches*.

TOPHET, What that Place was, 223

TRADES; some necessary Cautions about the Choice and Exercise of *Trades* or Employments, 281—5

TRADITION made of equal Authority with Scripture, in order to maintain some gainful Doctrines and Practices, 935. Both oral and written *Tradition* testifies the Authority of the Books of Scripture, 968

TREASURES. Lay not up for your selves *Treasures upon Earth*, forbid, either the setting too high a Value upon any Thing we can have in this World, 639, 40. Or making it our Design and Business to get or keep as large a Portion of worldly Riches as we can, 640. The Possession of worldly Riches not wholly forbidden here, 640, 1. Nor all desiring or endeavouring to get Riches that are absolutely necessary for our present Support, 641. But this Prohibition forbids five Things: 1st, The getting Riches unjustly, 641, 2. 2^{dly}, Making the getting of Riches the Design and Business of our Lives, 642. 3^{dly}, So much Carefulness to heap up huge *Treasures*, as hinders our providing for another Life, *ibid.* 4^{thly}, Bestowing so much Carefulness and Concern upon heaping up Superfluities, as is allowable only for the procuring of Necessaries, 642, 3. 5^{thly}, Too much Love and Concern to keep together what we have got, 643. The Reason of this Prohibition

tion

the principal Matters, &c.

tion, the uncertain Hold we have of worldly *Treasures*, 643, 4. See *Care*.

TREASURES in *Heaven*, the Command to lay up, &c. enjoins either the setting a high Value upon *heavenly Treasures*, 644. or making it our chief Design and Business to attain them, 644, 5. And this is done in general by the constant Tenor of a virtuous and holy Life, 645. And more especially by Works of Mercy and Charity, *ibid.* This Duty enforced by the Solidity and Certainty of *heavenly Treasures*, 646. And by representing a good Effect of taking up these Sentiments and Designs, *ibid.*

TRESPASSES or Sins, Punishment, particularly the Torments of Hell due to them, 553. When God forgives *Trespases*, he forbears to inflict Punishment on us, 553, 4. In praying God to *forgive us our Trespases*, we beg to be freed from Punishment, and confess we deserve it by our Sins, *ibid.* The Condition which we beg Forgiveness is, our own forgiving others all that they cannot pay us, and forbearing to revenge Injuries, 554, 5. We profess our Forgiveness of others with Humility and Distrust, and a secret Prayer that it may be sincere and perfect, 454—6. Three things chiefly to be learnt from the Petition, *Forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive, &c.* 1st, That there is some Condition necessary on our Part to qualify us to obtain Pardon of our Sins, 556, 7. (God has promised Pardon of Sin, upon Condition of Repentance, Prayer and Forgiveness of others, 557, 8. 615.) 2^{dly}, That one Condition necessary to qualify us to ask Pardon of God, is Forgiveness of others, 558, 9. And this a most equal and reasonable Condition, 559, 60. 3^{dly}, From this Petition, *forgive us as we forgive*, we learn the Nature of that Forgiveness which is our Duty, *viz.* to forgive the greatest Injuries, 560. though very often repeated, 560, 1. and that fully and perfectly, 561.

TRINITY. The Doctrine of a *Trinity* in *Unity*, no Contradiction, 1023. Other Truths, which we make no Doubt of, as incomprehensible to us as this, *ibid.*

TRUST and Hope in God, necessary both for Rich and Poor, 16. See *Father*. The present and future Blessedness of it, *ibid.* *Trust* in God for Food and Raiment, pressed from our own former Experience of his Power and Goodness to us in greater Instances, 689, 90. And

from his Goodness to much meaner Creatures, less dear to him than we are, such Fowls of the Air as no Man provides for, and who live without the least Appearance of Care; we may conclude that our *heavenly Father* will much more bless our honest Endeavours for Food, 690—3. *Trust* in God for Raiment, pressed in the same Manner from his Dealing with the Lilies of the Field, 694—6. Distrust of God scarce excusable in the *Gentiles*, but by no means so in the *Jews* or *Christians*, 697. God's perfect Knowledge of our Needs, joined with the Consideration of his Goodness and Power, renders all Distrust of him inexcusable, 697, 8.

U.

VAIN Glory, the Folly and Danger of it, 217

VALLEY of *Hinnom*. See *Tophet*.

VARIOUS READINGS, if compared with Judgment, more like to lead us to the true Meaning of Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense, 976. Those in Scripture of no great Moment, *ibid.*

VENIAL. See *Sins*.

VIRTUE. See *Religious Life*.

UNCERTAINTY of getting or keeping Riches. See *Treasures, Care. Uncertainty* of worldly Prosperity, 744

THE UNDERSTANDING, or Judgment, is to the Soul what the Eye is to the Body, 652, 3. See *Eye*. The Importance of having it rightly informed, 654, 5. Directions how to help the Eye of the *Understanding* so that it may rightly discern the Nature of Good and Evil. To keep it from being darken'd by Lust, or Passion, or Sensuality, 655. To consider Things by the true Light of Reason and Revelation, 656, 7. To consider them seriously and attentively, 656, 7. To pray earnestly that we may be enlightened, 657. The Shallowness of our *Understandings* considered, 1024

UNIVERSAL Prohibitions in Scripture often to be understood in a limited Sense, 305, 6

UNSATISFYING Nature of Riches. See *worldly Goods, Treasures, Care*.

UNTIL, the Use of that Word in Scripture, 260

USURY, Doubts about the Lawfulness of it, *403, 4. It cannot be morally unjust, when profitable both to Borrower and Lender, 405, 6. Nor is it in this Case

An Alphabetical INDEX of

Case injurious to the Publick, 406. nor to the Poor, 406, 7. It cannot be unjust, if the Borrower be not hurt or oppressed by it, 407, 8. The Argument against *Usury* from the natural Barrenness of Money, not valid, 408, 9. All *Usury* is not condemn'd in Scripture, 409—12. *Usury*, why by many condemned as abominable, 411, 2. 413. How it may be lawfully practis'd, 413, 4. To what Persons we should lend without *Usury*, 414, 5. Lending thus an excellent Charity, 415

W.

WAR not forbidden by the Precept, *Resist not Evil*, 371, 2. Nor by any other Text of Scripture, 372, 3. Its Lawfulness in some Cases to be prov'd from Scripture, 373, 4

WICKED, the Multitude of them, and the small Number of the Godly in Comparison of them, makes it reasonable for us to judge for our selves, and not to be led by Example, 865. The Multitude of such no just Inducement to follow them, 867, 8. 1055

A WICKED Life, not always so pleasant as it appears, 854. The Entrance into a *wicked* Life, far easier than into a good one, both by Reason of our natural Corruptions, and the Temptations we meet with, 862. In the Way of *Wickedness* we are allured by Temptations suited to all Tempers, Ages, and Conditions of Life, *ibid.* This way is easy and agreeable, as it seems to be a way of Liberty, 862, 3. And because it has an Appearance of much Mirth and Jollity, 863. It appears the pleasanter, because the longer Men go on in it, the less sensible they are of its Evil and Danger, *ibid.* Lastly, by long Progress in *Wickedness* Repentance grows more difficult, which adds in Proportion to the Pleasure of Sin, *ibid.* The Ease and Pleasure of the Beginning and Progress of a *wicked* Life, strongly obliges Parents to be careful to breed their Children piously, 863, 4. The seeming Pleasure of *Wickedness* increasing, as we go farther on in it, shews us the Danger of being hardened, if we once allow our selves in any Sin, 864. The Difficulty of Repentance increasing every Day the farther we go on in *Wickedness*, shews the Necessity of a speedy Repentance for any Acts or Habits of Sin, *ibid.* The seeming Pleasures of a *wicked* Life, no just Encouragement for

us to live *wickedly*, since they bring us to Hell, 867. much less is the Multitude of *wicked* Persons a just Inducement to a *wicked* Life, 867, 8

WIFE. See *Divorce*. That Command, that a *Bishop* (or *Presbyter*) must be the Husband of one Wife, how to be understood, 294, 5

WILL of the Affections distinguished from the Will of the Judgment, 840

WILL, its Consent to sinful Acts is what contracts the Guilt, 82, 3

WILL of God twofold: 1st, The Will of his Counsel or Providence, 532, 3. In praying, that the Will of God's Counsel may be done, we pray that we and all Men may perfectly acquiesce in all God's Appointments for us, 533. Or else we actually submit, and resign our selves to that Will of God, 533, 4. 2^{dly}, The Will of his Precepts or Commands, 534. In praying, that the Will of God's Precepts or Commands may be done, we pray, 1st, That God would make known his Will to us and to all Men, *ibid.* And, 2^{dly}, That he would give us all Grace obediently to perform it, *ibid.* even like the holy Angels in Heaven, 534, 5. which means, 1st, That all Men may be obedient, as are all the Angels in Heaven, 535. 2^{dly}, That they may obey with a good Will, *ibid.* 3^{dly}, Readily undertake, *ibid.* 4^{thly}, Speedily execute, 535, 6. all his Commands universally, 536. By praying that the Will of God's Counsels may be done, we are engaged to a perfect Submission to God's Providence, *ibid.* To do so most reasonable, both because of God's Wisdom, 536, 7. and of his Goodness, 537. By being taught to pray for God's Grace, to do his Will of Precept, we are admonish'd that we cannot perform it acceptably without that Grace, 337, 8. and that God requires no more of us, than by his Grace we shall be enabled to perform, 538. As we pray that God's Will may be done, so should we endeavour to know and do it, *ibid.* As by this Petition, *Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven*, we are taught the necessary Qualifications of an acceptable Obedience, so we ought to endeavour for them, 538—40. Will of God; doing it does not exclude the saying, *Lord, Lord*, but supposes it, and adds to it, 907. He can't be said to do the Will of God, whose good Actions are not the Fruits of a lively Faith, *ibid.* Nor he, who having Faith, does not openly profess it, *ibid.*

the principal Matters, &c.

Nor he, who does not trust in the Mercy of God in Christ for Salvation, 907. Nor he who neglects the Duties of religious Worship, Hearing, Prayer, &c. *ibid.* But he does the *Will* of God, who diligently learns and practises all the Duties owing to God, his Neighbour, and himself, 908. This does not imply finless Obedience, but a sincere and hearty Endeavour to keep all God's Commandments; and whensoever we fall, rising again by Repentance, *ibid.* Since those only, who thus *do the Will of God, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*, it follows first, that we are not to place too much Confidence in the Privileges of Church-Membership, &c. 908, 9. Nor trust to a Death-Bed Repentance, 909,

10
WOMAN. Looking on a Woman to lust after her, what, 267, 8. Why called *Adultery*, 271, 2. 275. This always sinful, but exceedingly so in the publick Worship of God, 268. Consequently those Women faulty, who dress immodestly to be look'd at, 268, 9. In forbidding to look upon a Woman, &c. *Christ* forbad every thing that may occasion, tempt or incite to Uncleaness, 269. Particularly looking upon and keeping for that End, obscene Pictures and Books, *ibid.* Acting, or seeing acted, unchast Plays, 269, 70. All impure Discourse, 270. All pampering the Body with too much, or too nourishing, Meat and Drink, *ibid.* The Reasonableness of this Prohibition, 271—4. Chastity made easier by it, 273, 4. *Woman*. See *Divorce*.

WORD of God. We should try the

Doctrines of all Teachers by it, 878, 9. What Reverence due to the *Word of God*, 518. See *Scripture*. Holy *Word of God*, or Doctrine of the Gospel, not to be imprudently forc'd upon any, but only on such as are disposed to receive it, 802. Especially the mysterious Doctrines, *ibid.* See *Hearing*.

WORKS good. See *Design*. The Difference between St. *Paul's* Use of the Word *Works* and St. *James's*, 1089, 90. That St. *Paul* did not intend to exclude such good *Works* as St. *James* makes necessary for our Justification, proved from the Design and Occasion of St. *Paul's* Writings, 1090—3. And from the several Cautions intermixed, to prevent our mistaking his Meaning, 1093, 4. What *Works* St. *Paul* meant to exclude, 1089. 1094

WORLD. Contempt of the *World*, reasonable both in Rich and Poor, 18, 9. The present Blessedness, and future Reward, attending a Contempt of the *World*, 19, 20. learnt from Afflictions, 29, 30

WORLDLY Goods unsatisfying, 67. 704. 715, 6. Against immoderate Desires of, and anxious Thoughts about them, with respect to the Time to come, 543, 4. 545—7. See *Care*, *Treasures*, *Uncertainty*.

WORSHIP of God. See *Examination*, *Repentance*, *Justice*, *Satisfaction*, *Reverence*. *Worship* publick, to be exactly attended, 159. 249, 50. 472, 3. 517. An Encouragement to *publick Worship*, 511. which is to be perform'd in a due Manner, 517, 8

WOUNDING any Person. See *Satisfaction*.

F I N I S.





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